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The Witch's Head
by
H. Rider Haggard

THE WITCH'S HEAD.

VOL. III.

THE WITCH'S HEAD

BY

H. RIDER HAGGARD,
AUTHOR OF 'DAWN.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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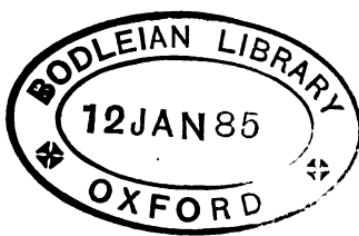
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THE WITCH'S HEAD.

CHAPTER I.

HANS' CITY OF REST.

MR. ALSTON, Ernest, and Jeremy had very good sport among the elephants, killing in all nineteen bulls. It was during this expedition that an incident occurred which in its effect endeared Ernest to Mr. Alston more than ever.

The boy Roger, who always went wherever Mr. Alston went, was the object of his father's most tender solicitude. He believed in the boy as he believed in little else in the world—for at heart Mr.

Alston was a sad cynic—and to a certain extent the boy justified his belief. He was quick, intelligent, and plucky, much such a boy as you may pick by the dozen out of any English public school, except that his knowledge of men and manners was more developed, as is usual among young colonists. At the age of twelve Master Roger Alston knew many things denied to most children of his age. On the subject of education Mr. Alston had queer ideas. ‘The best education for a boy,’ he would say, ‘is to mix with grown-up gentlemen. If you send him to school, he learns little except mischief; if you let him live with gentlemen, he learns, at any rate, to be a gentleman.’

But whatever Master Roger knew, he did not know much about elephants, and on this point he was destined to gain some experience.

One day—it was just after they had got into the elephant country—they were all engaged in following the fresh spoor of an apparently solitary bull. But though an elephant is a big beast, it is hard work catching him up, because he never seems to get tired, and this was exactly what our party of hunters found. They followed that energetic elephant for hours, but they could not catch him, though the spoorers told them that he certainly was not more than a mile or so ahead. At last the sun began to get low, and their legs had already got tired, so they gave it up for that day, determining to camp where they were. This being so, after a rest, Ernest and the boy Roger started out of camp to see if they could not shoot a buck or some birds for supper. Roger had a repeating Winchester carbine, Ernest a double-barrelled shot gun. Hardly had

they left the camp when Aasvögel, Jeremy's Hottentot, came running in, and reported that he had seen the elephant, an enormous bull with a white spot upon his trunk, feeding in a clump of mimosa, not a quarter of a mile away. Up jumped Mr. Alston and Jeremy, as fresh as though they had not walked a mile, and seizing their double-eight elephant rifles, started off with Aasvögel.

Meanwhile Ernest and Roger had been strolling towards this identical clump of mimosa. As they neared it the former saw some guinea-fowl run into the shelter of the trees.

‘Capital !’ he said, ‘guinea-fowl are first-class eating. Now, Roger, just you go into the bush and drive the flock over me. I’ll stand here and make believe they are pheasants.’

The lad did as he was bid. But in

order to get well behind the covey of guinea-fowl, which are dreadful things to run, he made a little circuit through the thickest part of the clump. As he did so his quick eye was arrested by a most unusual performance on the part of one of the flat-crowned mimosa trees. Suddenly, and without the slightest apparent reason, it rose into the air, and then, behold, where its crown had been a moment before, appeared its roots.

Such an 'Alice in Wonderland' sort of performance on the part of a tree could not but excite the curiosity of an intelligent youth. Accordingly, Roger pushed forward, and, getting round an intervening tree, this was what he saw. In a little glade about ten paces from him, flapping its ears, stood an enormous elephant with great white tusks, looking as large as a house, and as cool as a cucumber.

Nobody, to look at the brute, would have believed that he had given them a twenty miles' trot under a burning sun. He was now refreshing himself by pulling up mimosa trees as easily as though they were radishes, and eating the sweet fibrous roots.

Roger saw this, and his heart burned with ambition to kill that elephant, the mighty great beast about a hundred times as big as himself, who could pull up a large tree and make his dinner off the roots. He was a plucky boy, was Roger, and in his sportsmanlike zeal he quite forgot that a repeating carbine is not exactly the weapon one would choose to shoot elephants with. Indeed, without giving the matter another thought, he lifted the little rifle, aimed it at the great beast's head, and fired. He hit it somewhere, that was very clear, for next moment the

air resounded with the most terrific scream of fury that it had ever been his lot to hear. That scream was too much for him, he turned and fled swiftly. Elephants were evidently difficult things to kill.

Fortunately for Roger the elephant could not for some seconds make out where his tiny assailant was. Presently, however, he winded him, and came crashing after him, screaming shrilly, with his trunk and tail well up. On hearing the shot and the scream of the elephant, Ernest, who was standing some way out in the open in anticipation of a driving shot at the guinea-fowl, had run towards the spot where Roger had entered the bush, and just as he got opposite to it, out he came, scuttling along for his life, with the elephant not more than twenty paces behind him.

Then Ernest did a brave thing.

‘Make for the bush!’ he yelled to the

boy, who at once swerved to the right. On thundered the elephant, straight towards Ernest. But with Ernest it was evident he considered he had no quarrel, for presently he tried to swing himself round after Roger. Then Ernest lifted his shot gun and sent a charge of No. 4 into the brute's face, stinging him sadly. It was, humanly speaking, certain death which he courted, but at the moment his main idea was to save the boy. Screaming afresh, the elephant abandoned the pursuit of Roger, and made straight for Ernest, who fired the other barrel of small shot in the vain hope of blinding him. By now the boy had pulled up, being some forty yards off, and seeing Ernest just about to be crumpled up, wildly fired the repeating rifle in their direction. Some good angel must have guided the little bullet, for it, as it happened, struck

the elephant in the region of the knee, and, forcing its way in, slightly injured a tendon, and brought the great beast thundering to the ground. Ernest had only just time to dodge to one side as the huge mass came to the earth ; indeed, as it was he got a tap from the tip of the elephant's trunk, which knocked him down, and, though he did not feel it at the time, made him sore for days afterwards. In a moment, however, he was up again and away at his best speed legging it as he never legged it before in his life, and so was the elephant. People have no idea at what a pace an elephant *can* go when he is out of temper, until they put it to the proof. Had it not been for the slight injury to the knee, and the twenty yards start he got, Ernest would have been represented by little pieces before he was ten seconds older. As it

was, when, a hundred and fifty yards further on, elephant and Ernest broke upon the astonished view of Mr. Alston and Jeremy, who were hurrying up to the scene of action, they were almost one flesh, that is, the tip of the elephant's trunk was now up in the air, and now about six inches off the seat of Ernest's trousers, at which it snapped convulsively.

Up went Jeremy's heavy rifle, which luckily he had in his hand.

‘Behind the shoulder, half-way down the ear,’ said Mr. Alston beckoning to a Kafir to bring his rifle, which he was carrying. The probability of Jeremy’s stopping the beast at that distance—they were quite sixty yards off—was infinitesimal.

There was a second’s pause. The snapping tip touched the retreating trousers, but did not get hold of them, and the contact sent a magnetic thrill up Ernest’s back.

'Boom—thud—crash,' and the elephant was down dead as a door-nail. Jeremy had made no mistake, the bullet went straight through the great brute's heart, and broke the shoulder on the other side. He was one of those men who not only rarely miss, but always seem to hit their game in the right place.

Ernest sank exhausted on the ground, and Mr. Alston and Jeremy rushed up rejoicing.

'Near go that, Ernest,' said the former.

Ernest nodded in reply, he could not speak.

'By Jove, where is Roger?' he went on, turning pale as he missed his son for the first time.

But at this moment that young gentleman hove in sight, and recovering from his fright when he saw that the great animal was stone dead, rushed up with yells of

exultation, and climbing on to the upper tusk, began to point out where he had hit him.

Meanwhile Mr. Alston had extracted the story of the adventure from Ernest.

‘You young rascal,’ he said to his son, ‘come off that tusk. Do you know that if it had not been for Mr. Kershaw here, who courted almost certain death to save you from the results of your own folly, you would be as dead as that elephant and as flat as a biscuit. Come down, sir, and offer up your thanks to Providence and Mr. Kershaw that you have a sound square inch of skin left on your worthless young body.’

Roger descended accordingly, considerably crestfallen.

‘Never you mind, Roger, that was a most rattling good shot of yours at his knee,’ said Ernest, who had now got his

breath again. ' You would not do it again if you fired at elephants for a week.'

And so the matter passed off, but afterwards Mr. Alston thanked Ernest with tears in his eyes for saving his son's life.

This was the first elephant they killed, and also the largest. It measured ten feet eleven inches at the shoulder, and the tusks weighed when dried out, about sixty pounds each. They remained in the elephant country for nearly four months, when the approach of the unhealthy season forced them to leave it—not, however, before they had killed a great quantity of large game of all sorts. It was a most successful hunt, so successful indeed that the ivory they brought down paid all the expenses of the trip and left a handsome surplus over.

It was on the occasion of their return to Pretoria that Ernest made the acquaintance of a curious character in a curious way.

As soon as they got to the boundaries of the Transvaal, Ernest bought a horse from a Boer on which he used to ride after the herds of buck which swarmed upon the high veldt. They had none with them, because in the country where they had been shooting no horse would live. One day, as they were travelling slowly along a little before midday, a couple of bull vilderbeeste galloped across the waggon track about two hundred yards in front of the oxen. The voorlooper stopped the oxen in order to give Ernest, who was sitting on the waggon box with a rifle by his side, a steady shot. Ernest fired at the last of the two galloping bulls. The line was good, but he did not make sufficient allowance for the pace at which the bull was travelling, with the result that instead of striking it forward and killing it, the bullet shattered its flank and did not stop its career.

‘Dash it,’ said Ernest, when he saw what he had done, ‘I can’t leave the poor beast like that. Bring me my horse, I will go after him and finish him.’

The horse, which was tied already saddled behind the waggon, was quickly brought, and Ernest mounting told them not to keep the waggons for him, as he would strike across country and meet them at the outspan place, about a mile or so on. Then he started after his wounded bull, which could be plainly discerned standing with one leg up on the crest of a rise about a thousand yards away. But if ever a vilderbeeste was possessed by a fixed determination not to be finished off, it was that particular vilderbeeste. The pace at which a vilderbeeste can travel on three legs when he is not too fat is perfectly astonishing, and Ernest had traversed a couple of miles of great rolling plain before

he even got within fair galloping distance of him. He had a good horse, however, and at last he got within fifty yards, and then away they went at a merry pace, Ernest's object being to ride alongside and put a bullet through him. Their gallop lasted a good two miles or more. On the level Ernest gained on the vilderbeeste, but whenever they came to a patch of ant-bear holes or a ridge of stones, the vilderbeeste had the pull and drew away again. At last they came to a dry pan or lake about half a mile broad, crowded with hundreds of buck of all sorts, which scampered away as they came tearing along. Here Ernest at length drew up level with his quarry, and grasping the rifle with his right hand, tried to get it so that he could put a bullet through the beast and drop him. But it was no easy matter, as any one who has ever tried it will know, and

while he was still making up his mind, the vilderbeeste slued round and came at him bravely. Had his horse been unused to the work, he must have had his inside ripped out by the crooked horns, but he was an old hunter and equal to the occasion. To turn was impossible, the speed was too great, but he managed to slue with the result that the charging animal brushed his head, ^{ff} instead of landing himself in his belly. At the same moment Ernest stretched out his rifle and pulled the trigger, and, as it chanced, put the bullet right through the vilderbeeste and dropped him dead.

Then he pulled up, and dismounting cut off some of the best of the beef with his hunting-knife, stowed it away in a saddle-bag, and set off on his horse, now pretty well fagged, to find the waggons. But to find a waggon-track on the great veldt, unless you have in the first instance taken

the most careful bearings, is almost as difficult as it would be to return from a distance to any given spot on the ocean without a compass. There are no trees or hills to guide one, nothing but a vast wilderness of land resembling a sea petrified in a heavy swell.

Ernest rode on for three or four miles, as he thought retracing his steps over the line of country he had traversed, and at last to his joy struck the path. There were waggon-tracks on it, but he thought they did not look quite fresh. However, he followed them *faute de mieux* for some five miles. Then he became convinced that they could not have been made by his waggons. He must have overshot the mark, and must hark back. So he turned his weary horse's head, and made his way back along the road to the spot where his spoor struck into it. The waggons must be outspanned,

waiting for him a little further back. He went on, one mile, two, three—no waggons. A little to the left of the road was an eminence. He rode to it, and up and scanned the horizon. Oh, joy! there far away, five or six miles off, was the white cap of a waggon. He rode to it straight across country. Once he got bogged in a vlei or swamp, and had to throw himself off and drag his horse out by the bridle. He struggled on, and at last came to the dip in which he had seen the waggon-tent. It was a great white stone perched on a mound of brown ones.

By this time he had utterly lost his reckoning. Just then, to make matters worse, a thunder-shower came up with a bitter wind, and drenched him to the skin. The rain passed, but the wind did not. It blew like ice and chilled his frame, enervated with the tropical heat in which

he had been living, through and through. He wandered on aimlessly, till suddenly his tired horse put his foot in a hole and fell heavily, throwing him on to his head and shoulder. For a few minutes his senses left him, but he recovered, and mounting his worn-out horse, wandered on again. Luckily he had broken no bones. Had he done so he would probably have perished miserably in that lonely place.

The sun was sinking now, and he was faint for want of food, for he had eaten nothing that day but a biscuit. He had not even a pipe of tobacco with him. Just as the sun vanished he hit a little path, or what might once have been a path. He followed it till the pitch darkness set in; then he got off his horse and took off the saddle, which he put down on the bare black veldt, for a fire had recently swept off the dry grass, and wrapping the saddle-

cloth round his feet, laid his aching head upon the saddle. The reins of his horse he hitched round his arm, lest the animal should stray away from him to look for food. The wind was bitterly cold, and he was wet through; the hyænas came and howled round him. He cut off a piece of the raw meat and chewed it, but it turned his stomach and he spat it out. Then he shivered and sank into a torpor from which there was a poor chance of his awakening.

How long he lay so he did not know, it seemed a few minutes, it was really an hour, when suddenly he was awakened by feeling something shaking him by the shoulder.

‘What is it?’ he said wearily.

‘Wat is it? ach Himmel! wat is it? dat is just wat I wants to know. Wat do you here? You shall die so.’

The voice was the voice of a German, and Ernest knew German well.

‘I have lost my way,’ he said in that language, ‘I cannot find the waggons.’

‘Ah, you can speak the tongue of the Vater-land,’ said his visitor, still addressing him in English. ‘I will embrace you,’ and he did so.

Ernest sighed. It is a bore to be embraced in the dark by an unknown male German, when you feel that you are not far off dissolution.

‘You are hungered?’ said the German.

Ernest signified that he was.

‘And athirsted?’

Again he signified assent.

‘And perhaps you have no “gui”?’
(tobacco).

‘No, none.’

‘Good! my little wife, my Wilhemina, shall find you all these things.’

‘What the devil,’ thought Ernest to himself, ‘can a German be doing with his little wife in this place?’

By this time the stars had come out, and gave a little light.

‘Come, rouse yourself, and come and see my little wife. Oh, the pferd!’ (horse)—‘we will tie him to my wife. Ah, she is beautiful, though her leg shakes. Oh, yes, you will love her.’

‘The deuce I shall!’ ejaculated Ernest, and then, mindful of the good things the lady in question was to provide him with, he added solemnly, ‘Lead on, Macduff.’

‘Macduffer! my name is not so, my name is Hans; all ze great South Africa know me very well, and all South Africa love my wife.’

‘Really!’ said Ernest.

Although he was so miserable, he began to feel that the situation was interesting. A lady to whom his horse was to be tied, and whom all South Africa was enamoured of, could hardly fail to be interesting.

Rising, he advanced a step or two with his friend, whom he could now see was a large, burly man with white hair, apparently about sixty years of age. Presently they came to something that in the dim light reminded him of the hand-hearse in Kesterwick church, only it had two wheels instead of four, and no springs.

‘Behold my beautiful wife,’ said the German. ‘Soon I will show you how her leg shakes; it shakes, oh, horrid.’

‘Is—is the lady inside?’ asked Ernest. It occurred to him that his friend might be carting about a corpse.

‘Inside! no, she is outside, she is all over,’ and stepping back, the German put his head on one side in a most comical fashion, and regarding the unofficial hearse with the deepest affection, said in a low voice, ‘Ah, liebe vrouw, ah, Wilhemina, is you tired, my dear? and how is your poor leg?’ and

he caught hold of a groggy wheel and shook it.

Had Ernest been a little less wretched, and one degree further off starvation, it is probable that he would have exploded with laughter, for he had a keen sense of the ludicrous ; but he had not got a laugh left in him, and, besides, he was afraid of offending the German. So he merely murmured, 'Poor, poor leg,' sympathetically, and then alluded to the question of eatables.

'Ah, yes, of course. Let us see what Wilhemina shall give us,' and he trotted round to the back end of the cart, which, in keeping with its hearse-like character, opened by means of two little folding doors, and pulled out, first, two blankets, one of which he gave to Ernest to put round his shoulders ; second, a large piece of biltong, or sun-dried game flesh, and some biscuits ; and, third, a bottle

of peach brandy. On these viands they fell to, and though they were not in themselves of an appetizing nature, Ernest never enjoyed anything more in his life. Their meal did not take long, and after it his friend Hans produced some excellent Boer tobacco, and over their pipe he told him how he had lost his way. Hans asked him what road he had been travelling on.

‘The Rustenburg road.’

‘Then, my friend, you are not more than one thousand paces off it. My wife and I we travel along him all day, till just now Wilhemina she think she would like to come up here, and so I come, and now you see the reason why. She know you lie here and die in the cold, and she turn up to save your life. Ah, the good woman !’

Ernest was greatly relieved to hear that he was so near the road, as, once upon it, he would have no difficulty in falling in with

the waggons. Clearly he must during the latter part of his wanderings have been unknowingly approaching it. His mind, relieved upon this point, was at liberty to satisfy his curiosity about his friend. He soon discovered that he was a harmless lunatic, whose craze it was to wander all over South Africa, dragging his hand-cart after him. He made for no fixed point, nor had he any settled round. The beginning of the year might find him near the Zambesi, and the end near Cape Town, or anywhere else. By the natives he was looked upon as inspired, and invariably treated with respect, and he lived upon what was given to him, or what he shot as he walked along. This mode of life he had pursued for years, and though he had many adventures, he never came to harm.

‘ You see, my friend,’ said the simple man, in answer to Ernest’s inquiries, ‘ I make my

wife down there in Scatterdorp, in the old colony. The houses are a long way off each other there, and the church it is in the middle. And the good volk there, they did die very fast, and did get tired of carrying each other to be buried. And so they come to me and say, "Hans, you are a carpenter, you must make a beautiful black cart to put us in when we die." And so I set to, and I work, and work, and work at my cart till I gets quite—what you call him—stoopid. And then one night, just as my cart is finished, I dreams that she and I are travelling along a wide straight road like the road on the high veldt, and I knows that she is my wife, and that we must travel always together till we reach the City of Rest. And far, far away, above the top of a high mountain like the Drakensberg, I see a great wide tree, rooted on a cloud and covered all over with beautiful snow, that shined in the sunlight

like the diamonds at Kimberley. And I know that under that tree is the gate of the real Rustenburg, the City of Rest, and my wife and I, we must journey on, on, on till we find it.'

'Where do you come from now?' asked Ernest.

'From Utrecht, from out of the east, where the sun rises so red every morning over Zululand, the land of bloodshed. Oh, the land will run with blood there. I know it; Wilhemina told me as we came along; but I don't know when. But you are tired. Good! you shall sleep with Wilhemina; I will sleep beneath her. No, you shall, or she will be—what you call him—offended.'

Ernest crept into the cavity, and at once fell asleep, and dreamt that he had been buried alive. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, there was a most fearful jolt, caused by his horse, which was tied to the

pole of Wilhemina, having pulled the prop aside and let the pole down with a run. This Ernest mistook for the resurrection, and was extremely relieved to find himself in error. At dawn he emerged, bade his friend farewell, and gaining the road rejoined the waggons in safety.

CHAPTER II.

ERNEST ACCEPTS A COMMISSION.

A YOUNG man of that ardent, impetuous, intelligent mind which makes him charming and a thing to love, as contrasted with the young man of the sober, cautious, money-making mind (infinitely the most useful article), which makes him a 'comfort' to his relatives and a thing to respect, avoid, and marry your daughter to, has two great safeguards standing between him and the ruin which dogs the heels of the ardent, the impetuous, and the intelligent. These are, his religion and his belief in women. It is probable that he will start on his erratic career with a full store of both. He has

never questioned the former ; the latter, so far as his own class in life is concerned, are to him all sweet and good, and perhaps there is one particular star who only shines for him, and is the sweetest and best of them all. But one fine day the sweetest and best of all throws him over, being a younger son, and marries his eldest brother, or a paralytic cotton-spinner of enormous wealth and uncertain temper, and then a sudden change comes over the spirit of the ardent, intelligent, and impetuous one. Not being of a well-balanced mind, he rushes to the other extreme, and believes in his sore heart that all women would throw over such as he and marry eldest brothers or superannuated cotton-spinners. He may be right or he may be wrong. The materials for ascertaining the fact are wanting, for all women engaged to impecunious young gentlemen do not get the chance. But, right or wrong, the result

upon the sufferer is the same—his faith in woman is shaken, if not destroyed. Nor does the mischief stop there ; his religion often follows his belief in the other sex, for in some mysterious way the two things are interwoven. A young man of the nobler class of mind in love, is generally for the time being a religious man ; his affection lifts him more or less above the things of earth, and floats him on its radiant wings a day's journey nearer heaven.

The same thing applies conversely. If a man's religious belief is emasculated, he becomes suspicious of the 'sweetest and best,' he grows cynical, and no longer puts faith in superlatives. From atheism there is but a small step to misogyny, or rather to that disbelief in humanity which embraces a profounder constituent disbelief in its feminine section, and in turn, as already said, the misogynist walks daily along the edge of

atheism. Of course there is a way out of these discouraging results. If the mind that suffers and falls through its suffering be of the truly noble order, it may in time come to see that this world is a world not of superlatives, but of the most arid positives, with here and there a little comparative oasis to break the monotony of its general outline. Its owner may learn that the fault lay with him, for believing too much, for trusting too far, for setting up as an idol a creature exactly like himself, only several degrees lower beneath proof; and at last may come to see that though 'sweetests and bests' are chimerical, there are women in the world who may fairly be called 'sweet and good.' Or, to return to the converse side of the picture, it may occur to our young gentleman that although Providence starts us in the world with a full inherited or indoctrinated belief in a given religion, that is not what

Providence understands by faith. Faith, perfect faith, is only to be won by struggle, and in most cultivated minds by the passage through the dim, mirage-clad land of disbelief. 'The true believer is he who has trodden down disbelief, not he who has run away from it. When we have descended from the height of our childhood, when we have entertained Apollyon, and, having considered what he has to say, given him battle and routed him in the plain, then, and not till then, can we say with guileless hearts, 'Lord, I believe,' and feel no need to add the sadly qualifying words, 'help Thou my unbelief.'

Now these are more or less principles of human nature. They may not be universally true, probably nothing is—that is, as we define and understand truth. But they apply to the majority of those cases which fall strictly within their limits. Amongst others they applied rather strik-

ingly to Ernest Kershaw. Eva's desertion struck his belief in womanhood to the ground, and soon his religion lay in the dust beside it. Of this his life for some years after that event gave considerable evidence. He took to evil ways, he forgot his better self. He raced horses, he went in with great success for love affairs that he would have done better to leave alone. Sometimes, to his shame be it said, he drank—for the excitement of drinking, not for the love of it. In short he gave himself and all his fund of energy up to any and every excitement and dissipation he could command, and he managed to command a good many. Travelling rapidly from place to place in South Africa, he was well known and well liked in all. Now he was at Kimberley, now at King William's Town, now at Durban. In each of these places he kept race-horses; in each there

was some fair woman's face that grew the brighter for his coming.

But Ernest's face did not grow the brighter; on the contrary, his eyes acquired a peculiar sadness which was almost pathetic in one so young. He could not forget. For a few days or a few months he might stifle thought, but it always re-arose. Eva, pale queen of women, was ever there to haunt his sleep, and though in his waking hours he might curse her memory, when night drew the veil from truth, the words he murmured were words of love eternal.

He no longer prayed, he no longer revered woman, but he was not the happier for having freed his soul from these burdens. He despised himself. Occasionally he would take stock of his mental condition, and at each such stock-taking he would notice that he had receded, not progressed. He

was growing coarse, his finer sense was being blunted, he was no longer the same Ernest who had written that queer letter to his betrothed before disaster overwhelmed him. Slowly and surely he was sinking. He knew it, but he did not try to save himself. Why should he? He had no object in life. But at times a great depression and weariness of existence would take possession of him. It has been said that he never prayed; that is not strictly true. Once or twice he did throw himself upon his knees, and pray with all his strength that he might die. He did more, he persistently courted death, and, as is usual in such cases, it persistently avoided him. About taking his own life he had scruples, or he would perhaps have taken it. In those dark days he hated life, and in his calmer and more reflective moments he loathed the pleasures and excitements by means of

which he strove to make it palatable. His was a fine-strung mind, and, in spite of himself, he shuddered when it was set to play such coarse music.

During those years Ernest seemed to bear a charmed existence. There was a well-known thoroughbred horse in the Transvaal which had killed two men in rapid succession. Ernest bought it and rode it, and it never hurt him. Disturbances broke out in Sikukuni's country, and one of the chief's strongholds was ordered to be stormed. Ernest rode down from Pretoria with Jeremy to see the fun, and reaching the fort the day before the attack, got leave to join the storming party. Accordingly, next day at dawn they attacked in the teeth of a furious fusillade, and in time took the place, though with very heavy loss to themselves. Jeremy got his hat shot off with one bullet and his hand cut

by another; Ernest as usual came off scatheless; the man next to him was killed, but he was not touched. After that he insisted upon going buffalo-shooting towards Delagoa Bay in the height of the fever season, having got rid of Jeremy by getting him to go to New Scotland to see about a tract of land they had bought. He started with a dozen bearers and Mazooku. Six weeks later he, Mazooku, and three bearers returned, all the rest were dead of fever.

On another occasion, Alston, Jeremy, and himself were sent on a political mission to a hostile chief, whose stronghold lay in the heart of almost inaccessible mountains. The 'indaba' (palaver) took all day, and was purposely prolonged in order to enable the intelligent native to set an ambush in the pass through which the white chiefs must go back, with strict instructions to murder all three of them. When they left the

stronghold the moon was rising, and as they neared the pass, up she came behind the mountains in all her splendour, flooding the wide valley behind them with her mysterious light, and throwing a pale sad lustre on every stone and tree. On they rode steadily through the moonlight and the silence, little guessing how near death was to them. The weird beauty of the scene sunk deep into Ernest's heart, and presently, when they came to a spot where a track ran out loopwise from the main pass, returning to it a couple of miles further on, he half insisted on their taking it, because it passed over yet higher ground, and would give them a better view of the moon-bathed valley. Mr. Alston grumbled at 'his nonsense' and complied, and meanwhile the party of murderers half a mile further on played with their assegais, and wondered why they did not hear the sound of the white

men's feet. But the white men had already passed along the higher path three-quarters of a mile to their right. Ernest's love of moonlight effects had saved them all from a certain and perhaps from a lingering death.

It was shortly after this incident that Ernest and Jeremy were seated together on the verandah of the same house at Pretoria where they had been living before they went on the elephant hunt, and which they had now purchased. Ernest had been in the garden watering a cucumber plant he was trying to develope from a very sickly seedling. Even if he only stopped a month in a place he would start a little garden, it was a habit of his. Presently he came back to the verandah, where Jeremy was as usual watching the battle of the red and black ants, which after several years' encounter was not yet finally decided.

'Curse that cucumber plant,' said Ernest

emphatically, 'it won't grow. I tell you what it is, Jeremy, I am sick of this place ; I vote we go away.'

'For goodness' sake, Ernest, let us have a little rest, you do rattle one about so in those confounded post-carts,' replied Jeremy, yawning.

'I mean, go away from South Africa altogether.'

'Oh,' said Jeremy, dragging his great frame into an upright position, 'the deuce you do ! And where do you want to go to —England ?'

'England ! no, I have had enough of England. South America, I think. But perhaps you want to go home. It is not fair to keep dragging you all over the world.'

'My dear fellow, I like it, I assure you. I have no wish to return to Mr. Cardus' stool. For goodness' sake don't suggest such a thing, I should be wretched.'

‘Yes, but you ought to be doing something with your life. It is all very well for me, who am a poor devil of a waif and stray, to go on with this sort of existence, but I don’t see why you should ; you should be making your way in the world.’

‘Wait a bit, my hearty,’ said Jeremy, with his slow smile ; ‘I am going to read you a statement of our financial affairs which I drew up last night. Considering that we have been doing nothing all this time except enjoy ourselves, and that all our investments have been made out of income, which no doubt your respected uncle fancies we have dissipated, I do not think that the total is so bad,’ and Jeremy read—

‘Landed property in Natal and the Trans-				
vaal, estimated value	...	...	£2500	
This house	...	...	...	940
Stock—waggons, &c., say	...	...	300	
Race-horses	...	...	...	—

I have left that blank.’

‘Put them at £800,’ said Ernest, after thinking. ‘You know I won £500 with “Lady Mary” on the Cape Town plate last week.’

Jeremy went on :—

‘Race-horses and winnings	...	...	£1300
Sundries—cash, balance, &c.	...	...	<u>180</u>
Total			£5220

Now of this we have actually saved and invested about two thousand five hundred, the rest we have made or it has accumulated. Now I ask you where could we have done better than that as things go, so don’t talk to me about wasting my time.’

‘Bravo, Jeremy! My uncle was right after all, you ought to have been a lawyer, you are first-class at figures. I congratulate you on your management of the estates.’

‘My system is simple,’ answered Jeremy. ‘Whenever there is any money to spare I

buy something with it, then you are not likely to spend it. Then, when I have things enough—waggons, oxen, horses, what not—I sell them and buy some land ; that can't run away. If you only do that sort of thing long enough you will grow rich at last.'

‘Sweetly simple, certainly. Well, five thousand will go a long way towards stocking a farm or something in South America, or wherever we make up our minds to go, and then I don't think that we need draw on my uncle any more. It is hardly fair to drain him so. Old Alston will come with us, I think, and will put in another five thousand. He told me some time ago that he was getting tired of South Africa, with its Boers and blacks, in his old age, and had a fancy to make a start in some other place. I will write to him to-night. What hotel is he staying at in Maritzburg ? the Royal,

isn't it? And then I vote we clear in the spring.'

' Right you are, my hearty.'

' But I say, Jeremy, I really should advise you to think twice before you come. A fine upstanding young man like you should not waste his sweetness on the desert air of Mexico, or any such place. You should go home and be admired of the young women—they like a great big chap like you—and make a good marriage, and rear up a large family in a virtuous, respectable, and Jones-like fashion. I am a sort of wandering comet without the shine, but I repeat, I see no reason why you should play tail to a second-class comet.'

' Married! get married! I! No, thank you, my boy. Look you, Ernest, in the words of the prophet, "When a wise man openeth his eye and seeth a thing, verily he shutteth it not up again." Now I opened

my eye and saw one or two things in the course of our joint little affair—Eva, you know.'

Ernest winced at the name.

'I beg your pardon,' said Jeremy, noticing it; 'I don't want to allude to painful subjects, but I must to make my meaning clear. I was very hard hit, you know, over that lady, but I stopped in time, and not having any imagination to speak of, did not give it rein. What is the consequence? I have got over it; sleep well at night, have a capital appetite, and don't think about her twice a week. But with you it is different. Hard hit too, large amount of imagination galloping about loose, so to speak,—rapturous joy, dreams of true love and perfect union of souls, which no doubt would be well enough if the woman could put in her whack of soul, which she can't, not having it to spare, but in a general way

is gammon. Results, when the burst-up comes : Want of sleep, want of appetite, a desire to go buffalo-shooting in the fever season, and to be potted by Basutus from behind rocks. In short, a general weariness and disgust of life—oh yes, you needn't deny it, I have watched you—most unwholesome state of mind. Further results : Horse-racing, a disposition to stop away from church, and nip Cape sherry ; and, worst sign of all, a leaning to ladies' society. Being a reasoning creature, I notice this, and draw my own deductions, which amount to the conclusion that you are in a fair way to go to the deuce, owing to trusting your life to a woman. And the moral of all this, which I lay to heart for my own guidance, is, never speak to a woman if you can avoid it, and when you can't, let your speech be yea, yea, and nay, nay. Then you stand a good chance of keeping your appetite and peace

of mind, and of making your way in the world. Marriage indeed—never talk to me of marriage again,' and Jeremy shivered at the thought.

Ernest laughed out loud at his lengthy disquisition.

‘And I’ll tell you what, old fellow,’ he went on, drawing himself up to his full height, and standing right over Ernest, so that the latter’s six feet looked very insignificant beside him, ‘never you speak to me about leaving you again unless you want to put me clean out of temper, because, look here, I don’t like it. We have lived together since we were twelve or thereabouts, and so far as I am concerned, I mean to go on living together to the end of the chapter, or till I see I am not wanted. You can go to Mexico, or the North Pole, or Acapulco, or wherever you like, but I shall go too, and so that is all about it.’

‘Thank you, old fellow,’ said Ernest simply ; and at that moment their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a Kafir messenger with a telegram addressed to Ernest. He opened it and read it. ‘Hulloa,’ he said, ‘here is something better than Mexico ; listen :

““ Alston, Pieter Maritzburg, to Kershaw, Pretoria. High Commissioner has declared war against Cetywayo. Local cavalry urgently required for service in Zululand. Have offered to raise small corps of about seventy mounted men. Offer has been accepted. Will you accept post of second in command ?—you would hold the Queen’s commission. If so, set about picking suitable recruits ; terms, ten shillings a-day, all found. Am coming up Pretoria by this post-cart. Ask Jones if he will accept sergeant-majorship.””

‘Hurrah !’ sung out Ernest with flashing

eyes. Here is some real service at last.
Of course you will accept.'

'Of course,' said Jeremy quietly ; 'but
don't indulge in rejoicings yet ; this is going
to be a big business, unless I am mistaken.'

CHAPTER III.

HANS PROPHESIES EVIL.

ERNEST and Jeremy did not let the grass grow under their feet. They guessed that there would soon be a great deal of recruiting for various corps, and so set to work at once to secure the best men. The stamp of man they aimed at getting was the colonial-born Englishman, both because such men have more self-respect, independence of character, and 'gumption,' than the ordinary drifting sediment from the fields and sea-ports, and also because they were practically ready-made soldiers. They could ride as well as they could walk,

they were splendid rifle-shots, and they had, too, from childhood been trained in the art of travelling without baggage, and very rapidly. Ernest did not find much difficulty in the task. Mr. Alston was well-known, and had seen a great deal of service as a young man in the Basutu wars, and stories were still told of his nerve and pluck. He was known, too, to be a wary man, not rash or over-confident, but of a determined mind; and what is more, to possess a perfect knowledge of Zulu warfare and tactics. This went a long way with intending recruits, for the first thing a would-be Colonial volunteer inquires into, is the character of his officers. He will not trust his life to men in whom he puts no reliance. He is willing to lose it in the way of duty, but he has a great objection to having it blundered away. Indeed, in many South African Volunteer Corps, it is

a fundamental principle that the officers should be elected by the men themselves. Once elected, however, they cannot be deposed except by competent authority.

Ernest, too, was by this time well-known in the Transvaal, and universally believed in. Mr. Alston could not have chosen a better lieutenant. He was known to have pluck and dash, and to be ready-witted in emergency; but it was not that only which made him acceptable to the individuals whose continued existence would very possibly depend upon his courage and discretion. Indeed, it would be difficult to say what it was; but there are some men who are by nature born leaders of their fellows, and who inspire confidence magnetically. Ernest had this great gift. At first sight he was much like any other young man, rather careless-looking than otherwise in appearance, and giving the

observer the impression that he was thinking of something else ; but old hands at native warfare, looking into his dark eyes, saw something there which told them that this young fellow, boy as he was, comparatively speaking, would not show himself wanting in the moment of emergency, either in courage or discretion. Jeremy's nomination, too, as sergeant-major, a very important post in such a corps, was popular enough. People had not forgotten his victory over the Boer giant, and besides, a sergeant-major with such a physique would have been a credit to any corps.

All these things helped to make recruiting an easy task, and when Alston and his son Roger, weary and bruised, stepped out of the Natal post-cart four days later, it was to be met by Ernest and Jeremy with the intelligence that his telegram had been received, the appointments accepted,

and thirty-five men provisionally enrolled subject to his approval.

‘My word, young gentlemen,’ he said, highly pleased, ‘you are lieutenants worth having.’

The next fortnight was a busy one for all concerned. The organization of a colonial volunteer corps is no joke, as anybody who has ever tried it can testify. There were rough uniforms to be provided, arms to be obtained, and a hundred and one other wants to be satisfied. Then came some delay about the horses, which were to be served out by Government. At last these were handed over, a good-looking lot, but apparently very wild. Matters were at this point, when one day Ernest was seated in the room he used as an office in his house, enrolling a new recruit previous to his being sworn, interviewing a tradesman about flannel shirts, making arrangements for a

supply of forage, filling up the endless forms which the Imperial authorities required for transmission to the War-office, and a hundred other matters. Suddenly his orderly announced that two privates of the corps wished to see him.

‘What is it?’ he asked of the orderly testily; for he was nearly worked to death.

‘A complaint, sir.’

‘Well, send them in.’

The door opened, and in entered a curious couple. One was a great, burly sailor-man, who had been corporal-at-arms on board one of H. M. ships at Cape Town, got drunk, overstayed his leave, and deserted rather than face the punishment; the other a quick, active little fellow, with a face like a ferret. He was a Zululand trader, who had ruined himself by drink, and a peculiarly valuable member of the corps on account of his knowledge of the country in

which they were going to serve. Both the men saluted and stood at ease.

‘ Well, my men, what is it ? ’ asked Ernest, going on filling up his forms.

‘ Nothing so far as I am concerned, sir,’ said the little man.

Ernest looked up sharply at the quondam tar.

‘ Now, Adam, your complaint ; I have no time to waste.’

Adam hitched up his breeches and began :

‘ You see, sir, I brought *he* here by the scruff of the neck.’

‘ That’s true, sir,’ said the little man, rubbing that portion of his body.

‘ Because he and I, sir, as is messmates, sir, ’ad a difference of opinion. It was his day, you see, sir, to cook for our mess, and instead of putting on the pot, sir, he comes to me he does, and he says, “ Adam, you father of a race of fools ”—that’s what he

says, sir, a-comparing of me to the gent who lived in a garden—"why don't you come and take the skins off the —— taters, instead of a squatting of yourself down on that —— bed!"'

'Slightly in error, sir,' broke in the little man; 'our big friend's memory is not as substantial as his form. What I said was, "My *dear* Adam, as I see you have nothing to do, except sit and play a Jew's-harp upon your *couch*, would you be so kind as to come and assist me to remove the outer skin of these potatoes?"'

Ernest began to explode, but checked himself and said, sternly:

'Don't talk nonsense, Adam, tell me your complaint, or go.'

'Well, sir,' answered the big sailor, scratching his head, 'if I must give it a name it is this—this here man, sir, be too *infarnal sargistic*.'

‘Be off with you both,’ said Ernest sternly, ‘and don’t trouble me with any such nonsense again, or I will put you both under arrest, and stop your pay. Come, march,’ and he pointed to the door. As he did so he observed a Boer gallop swiftly past the house, and take the turn to Government House.

‘What is up now?’ he wondered.

Half an hour afterwards another man passed the window, also at full gallop, and also turned up towards Government House. Another half-hour passed, and Mr. Alston came hurrying in.

‘Look here, Ernest,’ he said, ‘here is a pretty business. Three men have come in to report that Cetywayo has sent an Impi (army) round by the back of Secocoeni’s country to burn Pretoria, and return to Zululand across the High Veldt. They say that the Impi is now resting in the Salt-

pan Bush, about twenty miles off, and will attack the town to-night or to-morrow night. All these three, who have, by the way, had no communication with each other, state that they have actually seen the captains of the *Impi*, who came to tell them to bid the other Dutchmen stand aside, as they are now fighting the Queen, and they would not be hurt.'

'It seems incredible,' said Ernest; 'do you believe it?'

'I don't know. It is possible, and the evidence is strong. It is possible; I have known the Zulus make longer marches than that. The Governor has ordered me to gallop to the spot, and report if I can see anything of this *Impi*.'

'Am I to go too?'

'No, you will remain in the corps. I take Roger with me—he is a light weight—and two spare horses. If there should be

an attack and I should not be back, or if anything should happen, you will do your duty.'

' Yes.'

' Good-bye. I am off. You had best muster the men to be ready for an emergency—' and he was gone.

Ten minutes afterwards, down came an orderly from the officer commanding, with a peremptory order to the effect that the officer commanding Alston's Horse, was to mount and parade his men in readiness for immediate service.

' Here is a pretty go,' thought Ernest, ' and the horses not served out yet.'

Just then Jeremy came in, saluted, and informed him that the men were mustered.

' Serve out the saddlery. Let every man shoulder his saddle. Tell Mazook to bring out the " Devil " (Ernest's favourite horse), and march the men up to the Government stables. I will be with you presently.'

Jeremy saluted again with much ceremony and vanished. He was the most punctilious sergeant-major who ever breathed.

Twenty minutes later, a long file of men, each with a carbine slung to his back, and a saddle on his head, which, at a distance, gave them the appearance of a string of gigantic mushrooms, were to be seen proceeding towards the Government stables a mile away.

Ernest, mounted on his great black stallion, and looking, in his military uniform and the revolver slung across his shoulders, a typical volunteer officer, was there before them.

‘Now, my men,’ he said, as soon as they were paraded. ‘Go in, and each man choose the horse which he likes best, bridle him, and bring him out and saddle him. Sharp!’

The men broke their ranks and rushed to the stables, each anxious to secure a better

horse than his neighbours. Presently from the stables there arose a sound of kicking, plunging, and wohohing impossible to describe.

‘There will be a pretty scene soon, with these unbroken brutes,’ thought Ernest. He was not destined to be disappointed. The horses were dragged out, most of them lying back upon their haunches, kicking, bucking, and going through every other equine antic.

‘Saddle up!’ shouted Ernest as soon as they were all out.

It was done with great difficulty.

‘Now mount.’

Sixty men lifted their legs and swung themselves into the saddle, not without sad misgivings. A few seconds passed, and at least twenty of them were on the broad of their backs; one or two were being dragged by the stirrup-leather; a few were

clinging to their bucking and plunging steeds; and the remainder of Alston's Horse was scouring the plain in every possible direction. Never was there such a scene.

In time, however, most of the men got back again, and some sort of order was restored. Several men were hurt, one or two badly. These were sent to the hospital, and Ernest formed the rest into half-sections to be marched to the place of rendezvous. Just then, to make matters better, down came the rain in sheets, soaking them to the skin, and making confusion worse confounded. So they rode to the town, which was by this time in an extraordinary state of panic. All business was suspended; women were standing about on the verandahs, hugging their babies and crying, or making preparations to go into laager; men were hiding deeds and other valuables, or hurrying to defence meetings

on the market-square, where the Government were serving out rifles and ammunition to all able-bodied citizens ; frightened mobs of Basutos and Christian Kafirs were jabbering in the streets, and telling tales of the completeness of Zulu slaughter, or else running from the city to pass the night among the hills. Altogether the scene was most curious, till dense darkness came down over it like an extinguisher, and put it out.

Ernest took his men to a building which the Government had placed at their disposal, and had the horses stabled, but not unsaddled. Presently orders came down to him to keep the corps under arms all night ; to send out four patrols to be relieved at midnight to watch the approaches to the town ; and at dawn to saddle up and reconnoitre the neighbouring country.

Ernest obeyed these orders as well as he could ; that is, he sent the patrols out, but so dense was the darkness that they never got back again till the following morning, when they were collected, and, in one instance, dug out of the various ditches, quarry-holes, etc., into which they had fallen.

About eleven o'clock Ernest was seated in a little room that opened out of the main building where they were quartered, consulting with Jeremy about matters connected with the corps, and wondering if Alston had found a Zulu Impi, or if it was all gammon, when suddenly they heard the sharp challenge of the sentry outside :

‘Who goes there ?’

‘Whoever it is had better answer sharp,’ said Ernest ; ‘I gave the sentry orders to be quick with his rifle to-night.’

‘Bang !—crash !’ followed by loud howls

of 'Wilhemina, my wife! ah, the cruel man has killed my Wilhemina!'

'Heavens, it is that lunatic German! Here, orderly, run up to the Defence Committee and the Government Offices, and tell them that it is nothing; they will think the Zulus are here. Tell two men to bring the man in here, and to stop his howls.'

Presently Ernest's old friend of the High Veldt, looking very wild and uncouth in the lamplight, with his long beard and matted hair, from which the rain was dripping, was bundled rather unceremoniously into the room.

'Ah, there you are, dear sir; it is two—three year since we meet. I look for you everywhere, and they tell me you are here, and I come on quick all through the dark and the rain; and then before I know if I am on my head or my heel, the cruel

man he ups a rifle, and do shoot my Wilhemina, and make a great hole through her poor stomach. Oh, sir, wat shall I do ?' and the great child began to shed tears ; ' you too, you will weep ; you too love my Wilhemina, and sleep with her one night,—bo-hoo ! '

' For goodness' sake, stop that nonsense. This is no time or place for such fooling.'

He spoke sharply, and the monomaniae pulled up, only giving vent to an occasional sob.

' Now, what is your business with me ? '

The German's face changed from its expression of idiotic grief to one of refined intelligence. He glanced towards Jeremy, who was exploding in the corner.

' You can speak before this gentleman, Hans,' said Ernest.

' Sir, I am going to say a strange thing to you this night.' He was speaking quite

quietly and composedly now, and might have been mistaken for a sane man. ‘Sir, I hear that you go down to Zululand to help to fight the fierce Zulus. When I hear it, I was far away, but something come into my head to travel as quick as Wilhemina can, and come and tell you not to go.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘How can I say what I do mean? This I know—many shall go down to Zululand who rest in this house to-night, few shall come back.’

‘You mean that I shall be killed?’

‘I know not. There are things as bad as death, and yet not death.’ He covered his eyes with his hand, and continued: ‘I cannot *see* you dead, but do not go; I pray you do not go.’

‘My good Hans, what is the good of coming to me with such an old wives’ tale. Even if it were true, and I knew that I

must be killed twenty times, I should go ;
I cannot run away from my duty.'

'That is spoken as a brave man should,'
answered his visitor, in his native tongue.
'I have done *my* duty, and told you what
Wilhemina said. Now go, and when the
black men are pressing round you like the
sea-waves round a rock, may the God of
Rest guide your hand, and bring you safe
from the slaughter.'

Ernest gazed at the old man's pale face ;
it wore a curious rapt expression, and the
eyes were looking upwards.

'Perhaps, old friend,' he said, addressing
him in German, 'I, as well as you, have
a City of Rest which I would reach, and
care not if I pass thither on an assegai.'

'I know it,' replied Hans, in the same
tongue ; 'but useless is it to seek rest till
God gives it. You have sought and passed
through the jaws of many deaths, but you

have not found. If it be not God's will you will not find it now. I know you too seek rest, my brother, and had I known that you would find that only down there'—and he pointed towards Zululand—'I had not come to warn you, for blessed is rest, and happy he who gains it. But no, it is not that; I am sure now that you will not die; your evil, whatever it is, will fall from heaven.'

'So be it,' said Ernest; 'you are a strange man. I thought you a common monomaniac, and now you speak like a prophet.'

The old man smiled.

'You are right; I am both. Mostly I am mad. I know it. But sometimes my madness has its moments of inspiration, when the clouds lift from my mind, and I see things none others can see, and hear voices to which your ears are deaf. Such a moment is on me now; soon I shall be

mad again. But before the cloud settles I would speak to you. Why, I know not, save that I loved you when first I saw your eyes open there upon the cold veldt. Presently I must go, and we shall meet no more, for I draw near to the snow-clad tree that marks the gate of the City of Rest. I can look into your heart now and see the trouble in it, and the sad, beautiful face that is printed on your mind. Ah, she is not happy ; she, too, must work out her rest. But the time is short, the cloud settles, and I would tell you what is in my mind. Even though trouble, great trouble, close you in, do not be cast down, for trouble is the key of heaven. Be good ; turn to the God you have neglected ; struggle against the snares of the senses. Oh, I can see now. For you and for all you love there is joy and there is peace.'

Suddenly he broke off, the look of inspiration faded from his face, which grew stupid and wild-looking.

‘Ah, the cruel man ; he made a great hole in the stomach of my Wilhemina.’

Ernest had been bending forward listening with parted lips to the old man’s talk. When he saw that the inspiration had left him, he raised his head and said :

‘Gather yourself together, I beg you, for a moment. I wish to ask one question. Shall I ever——?’

‘How shall I stop de bleeding from the witals of my dear wife ?—who will plug up the hole in her !’

Ernest gazed at the man. Was he putting all this on ?—or was he really mad ? For the life of him he could not tell.

Taking out a sovereign, he gave it to him.

‘There is money to doctor Wilhemina

with,' he said. 'Would you like to sleep here?—I can give you a blanket.'

The old man took the money without hesitation, and thanked Ernest for it; but said he must go on at once.

'Where are you going to?' asked Jeremy, who had been watching him with great curiosity; but had not understood that part of the conversation which had been carried on in German.

Hans turned upon him with a quick look of suspicion.

'Rustenburg (Anglicè, the town of rest),' he answered.

'Indeed, the road is bad, and it is far to travel.'

'Yes,' he replied, 'the road is rough and long. Farewell!—and he was gone.

'Well, he is a curious old buster, and no mistake, with his cheerful anticipations, and his Wilhemina,' reflected Jeremy aloud.

‘Just fancy starting for Rustenburg at this hour of the night too! Why, it is a hundred miles off.’

Ernest only smiled. He knew that it was no earthly Rustenburg that the old man sought.

Some while afterwards he heard that he had attained the rest which he desired. Wilhemina got fixed in a snow-drift in a pass of the Drakensberg. He was unable to drag her out.

So he crept underneath and fell asleep, and the snow came down and covered him.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. ALSTON'S VIEWS.

THE Zulu attack on Pretoria ultimately turned out only to have existed in the minds of two mad Kafirs, who dressed themselves up after the fashion of chiefs, and personating two Zulu nobles of repute, who were known to be in the command of regiments, rode from house to house, telling the Dutch inhabitants that they had an Impi of thirty thousand men lying in the bush, and bidding them stand aside whilst they destroyed the Englishmen. Hence the scare.

The next month was a busy one for Alston's Horse. It was drill, drill, drill,

morning, noon, and night. But the results soon became apparent. In three weeks from the day they got their horses, there was not a smarter, quicker corps in South Africa, and Mr. Alston and Ernest were highly complimented on the soldier-like appearance of the men, and the rapidity and exactitude with which they executed all the ordinary cavalry manœuvres.

They were to march from Pretoria on the 10th of January, and expected to overtake Colonel Glynn's column, with which was the General, about the 18th, by which time Mr. Alston calculated the real advance upon Zululand would begin.

On the 8th, the good people of Pretoria gave the corps a farewell banquet, for most of its members were Pretoria men; and colonists are never behindhand when there is an excuse for conviviality and good fellowship.

Of course after the banquet, Mr.—or as he was now called Captain—Alston's health was drunk. But Alston was a man of few words, and had a horror of speech-making. He contented himself with a few brief sentences of acknowledgment, and sat down. Then somebody proposed the health of the other commissioned and non-commissioned officers, and to this Ernest rose to respond, making a very good speech in reply. He rapidly sketched the state of political affairs, of which the Zulu War was the outcome, and without expressing any opinion on the justice or wisdom of that war, of which, to speak the truth, he had grave doubts, he went on to show in a few well-chosen weighty words, how vital were the interests involved in its successful conclusion, now that it once had been undertaken. Finally, he concluded thus :

‘I am well aware, gentlemen, that with

many of those who are your guests here to-night, and my own comrades, this state of affairs and the conviction of the extreme urgency of the occasion has been the cause of their enlistment. It is impossible for me to look down these tables, and see so many in our rough and ready uniform, whom I have known in other walks of life, as farmers, storekeepers, Government clerks, and what not, without realizing most clearly the extreme necessity that can have brought these peaceable citizens together on such an errand as we are bent on. Certainly it is not the ten shillings a day, or the mere excitement of savage warfare, that has done this' (cries of No, no); 'because most of them can well afford to despise the money, and many more have seen enough of native war, and know well that few rewards and plenty of hard work fall to the lot of colonial volunteers. Then what is it? I will venture

a reply. It is that sense of patriotism which is a part and parcel of the English mind' (Cheers), 'and which from generation to generation has been the root of England's greatness, and, so long as the British blood remains untainted, will from unborn generation to generation be the main-spring of the greatness that is yet to be of those wider Englands, of which I hope this continent will become not the least.' (Loud cheers.)

'That, gentlemen and men of Alston's Horse, is the bond which unites us together ; it is the sense of a common duty to perform, of a common danger to combat, of a common patriotism to vindicate. And for that reason, because of the patriotism and the duty, I feel sure that when the end of this campaign comes, whatever that end may be, no one, be he imperial officer, or newspaper correspondent, or Zulu foe, will be able to say that Alston's Horse shirked

its work, or was mutinous, or proved a broken reed, piercing the side of those who leaned on it.' (Cheers.) 'I feel sure too that though there may be a record of brave deeds such as become brave men, there will be none of a comrade deserted in the time of need, or of failure in the moment of emergency, however terrible that emergency may be.' (Cheers.) 'Ay, my brethren in arms,' and here Ernest's eyes flashed and his strong clear voice went ringing down the great hall, 'whom England has called, and who have not failed to answer to the call, I repeat, however terrible may be that emergency, even if it should involve the certainty of death,—I speak thus because I feel I am addressing brave men, who do not fear to die, when death means duty, and life means dishonour,—I know well that you will rise to it, and, falling shoulder to shoulder, will pass as heroes

should on to the land of shades—on to that Valhalla of which no true heart should fear to set foot upon the threshold.'

Ernest sat down amidst ringing cheers. Nor did these noble words, coming as they did straight from the loyal heart of an English gentleman, fail of their effect. On the contrary, when a fortnight later Alston's Horse formed that fatal ring on Isandhlwana's bloody field, they flashed through the brain of more than one despairing man, so that he set his teeth and died the harder for them.

'Bravo, my young viking,' said Mr. Alston to Ernest, whilst the roof was still echoing to the cheers evoked by his speech, 'the old Bersekir spirit is cropping up, eh?' He knew that Ernest's mother's family, like so many of the old eastern county stocks, were of Danish extraction.

It was a great night for Ernest.

Two days later Alston's Horse, sixty-four strong, marched out of Pretoria with a military band playing before. Alas! they never marched back again.

At the neck of the poort or pass the band and the crowd of ladies and gentlemen who had accompanied them halted, and, having given them three cheers, turned and left them. Ernest too turned and gazed at the pretty town, with its white houses and rose hedges red with bloom, nestling on the plain beneath, and wondered if he would ever see it again. He never did.

The troop was then ordered to march at ease in half sections, and Ernest rode up to the side of Alston; on his other side was the boy Roger, now about fourteen years of age, who acted as Alston's aide-de-camp, and was in high spirits at the prospect of the coming campaign. Presently Alston

sent his son back to the other end of the line on some errand.

Ernest watched him as he galloped off, and a thought struck him.

‘Alston,’ he said, ‘do you think that it is wise to bring that boy into this business?’

His friend slued himself round sharply in the saddle.

‘Why not?’ he asked in his deliberate way.

‘Well, you know there is a risk.’

‘And why should not the boy run risks as well as the rest of us? Look here, Ernest, when I first met you there in France I was going to see the place where my wife was brought up. Do you know how she died?’

‘I have heard she died a violent death; I do not know how.’

‘Then I will tell you, though it costs me something to speak of it. She died by a Zulu assegai, a week after the boy was born.

She saved his life by hiding him under a heap of straw. Don't ask me particulars, I can't bear to talk of it. Perhaps now you understand why I am commanding a corps enrolled to serve against the Zulus. Perhaps too you will understand why the lad is with me. We go to avenge my wife and his mother, or to fall in the attempt. I have waited long for the opportunity ; it has come.'

Ernest relapsed into silence, and presently fell back to his troop.

On the 20th of January, Alston's Horse, having moved down by easy marches from Pretoria, camped at Rorke's Drift, on the Buffalo river, not far from a store and a thatched building used as a hospital, which were destined to become historical. Here orders reached them to march on the following day and join No. 3 column, with

which was Lord Chelmsford himself, and which was camped about nine miles from the Buffalo river, at a spot called Isandhlwana, or the 'Place of the Little Hand.' Next day, the 21st of January, the corps moved on accordingly, and following the waggon track that runs past the Inhlazatye mountain, by midday came up to the camp, where about two thousand five hundred men of all arms were assembled under the immediate command of Colonel Glynn. Their camp, which was about eight hundred yards square, was pitched facing a wide plain, with its back towards a precipitous slab-sided hill, of the curious formation sometimes to be seen in South Africa. This was Isandhlwana.

'Hullo,' said Alston, as, on reaching the summit of the neck over which the waggon road runs, they came in sight of the camp, 'they are not entrenched. By Jove,' he

added, after scanning the camp carefully, 'they haven't even got a waggon-laager,' and he whistled expressively.

'What do you mean?' asked Ernest. Mr. Alston so rarely showed surprise that he knew there must be something very wrong.

'I mean, Ernest, that there is nothing to prevent this camp from being destroyed, and every soul in it, by a couple of Zulu regiments, if they choose to make a night attack. How are they to be kept out, I should like to know, in the dark, when you can't see to shoot them, unless there is some barrier? These officers, fresh from home, don't know what a Zulu charge is, that is very clear. I only hope they won't have occasion to find out. Look there,' and he pointed to a waggon lumbering along before them, on the top of which, among a lot of other miscellaneous articles, lay a bundle of cricketing bats and wickets, 'they think

that they are going on a picnic. What is the use too, I should like to know, of sending four feeble columns sprawling over Zululand, to run the risk of being crushed in detail by a foe that can move from point to point at the rate of fifty miles a day, and which can at any moment slip past them and turn Natal into a howling wilderness ? There, it is no use grumbling ; I only hope I may be wrong. Get back to your troop, Ernest, and let us come into camp smartly. Form fours—Trot.'

On arrival in the camp, Mr. Alston learnt, on reporting himself to the officer commanding, that two strong parties of mounted men under the command of Major Dartwell were out on a reconnaissance towards the Inhlazatye mountain, in which direction the Zulus were supposed to be in force. The orders he received were to rest his horses, as he might be required to join the

mounted force with Major Dartnell on the morrow.

That night, as Alston and Ernest stood together at the door of their tent smoking a pipe before turning in, they had some conversation. It was a beautiful night, and the stars shone brightly. Ernest looked at them, and thought on how many of man's wars those stars had looked.

‘Star-gazing?’ asked Mr. Alston.

‘I was contemplating our future homes,’ said Ernest, laughing.

‘Ah, you believe that, do you? think you are immortal, and that sort of thing?’

‘Yes; I believe that we shall live many lives, and that some of them will be there,’ and he pointed to the stars. ‘Don’t you?’

‘I don’t know. I think it rather presumptuous. Why should you suppose that for you is reserved a bright destiny among the stars more than for these?’ and he put

out his hand and clasped several of a swarm of flying ants which was passing at the time. ‘Just think how small must be the difference between these ants and us in the eyes of a Power who can produce both. The same breath of life animates both. These have their homes, their government, their colonies, their drones and workers. They enslave and annex, lay up riches, and, to bring the argument to an appropriate conclusion, make peace and war. What then is the difference? We are bigger, walk on two legs, have a larger capacity for suffering, and,—we believe, a soul. Is it so great that we should suppose that for us, is reserved a heaven, or all the glorious worlds which people space, for these, annihilation? Perhaps we are at the top of the tree of development, and for them may be the future, for us the annihilation. Who knows? There, fly away, and make

the most of the present, for nothing else is certain.'

' You overlook religion entirely.'

' Religion ? Which religion ? There are so many. Our Christian God, Buddha, Mahomed, Brahma, all number their countless millions of worshippers. Each promises a different thing, each commands the equally intense belief of his worshippers, for with them all blind faith is a condition precedent ; and each appears to satisfy their spiritual aspirations. Can all of these be true religions ? Each holds the other false and outside the pale ; each tries to convert the other, and fails. There are many lesser ones of which the same thing may be said.'

' But the same spirit underlies them all.'

' Perhaps. There is much that is noble in all religions, but there is also much that is terrible. To the actual horrors and wearing anxieties of physical existence, religion

bids us add on the vaguer horrors of a spiritual existence, which are to be absolutely endless. The average Christian would be uncomfortable if you deprived him of his hell and his personal devil. For myself, I decline to believe in such things. If there is a hell it is this world ; this world is the place of expiation for the sins of the world, and the only real devil is the devil of man's evil passions.'

'It is possible to be religious and be a good man without believing in hell,' said Ernest.

'Yes, I think so, otherwise my chance is a poor one. Besides, I do not deny the Almighty Power. I only deny the cruelty that is attributed to Him. It may be that from the accumulated mass of the wrong and bloodshed and agony of this hard world, that Power is building up some high purpose. Out of the bodies of millions of

living creatures Nature worked out *her* purpose and made the rocks, but the process must have been unpleasant to the living creatures by whose humble means the great strata were reared up. They lived, to die in billions, that tens of thousands of years afterwards there might be a rock. It may be so with us. Our tears and blood and agony may produce some solid end that now we cannot guess ; their volume, which cannot be wasted, for nothing is wasted, may be building up one of the rocks of God's far-off purpose. But that we shall be tortured *here* for a time in order that we may be indefinitely tortured *there*, and he pointed to the stars, 'that I will never believe. Look at the mist rising from that hollow ; so does the reek of the world's misery rise as an offering to the world's gods. The mist will cease to rise, and fall again in rain, and bring a blessing ; but the

incense of human suffering rises night and day for so long as the earth shall endure, nor does it fall again in dews of mercy. And yet Christians, who declare that God is love, declare too that for the vast majority of their fellow-creatures this process is to continue from millennium to millennium.'

'It depends on our life, they say.'

'Look here, Ernest, a man can do no more than he can. When I got to the age of discretion, which I put at eight-and-twenty—you have hardly reached it yet, my boy, you are nothing but a babe—I made three resolutions: always to try and do my duty, never to turn my back on a poor man or a friend in trouble, and, if possible, not to make love to my neighbour's wife. Those resolutions I have often broken more or less either in the spirit or the letter, but in the main I have stuck to them, and I can put my hand upon my heart to-night and say,

“I have done my best! And so I go my path, turning neither to the right nor to the left, and when Fate finds me, I shall meet him fearing nothing, for I know he has wreaked his worst upon me, and can only at the utmost bring me eternal sleep; and hoping nothing, because my experience here has not been such as to justify the hope of any happiness for man, and my vanity is not sufficiently strong to allow me to believe in the intervention of a superior power to save so miserable a creature from the common lot of life. Good-night.’

On the following day his fate found him.

CHAPTER V.

ISANDHLWANA.

MIDNIGHT came, and the camp was sunk in sleep. Up to the sky, whither it was decreed their spirits should pass before the dark closed in again and hid their mangled corses, floated the faint breath of some fourteen hundred men. There they lay, sleeping the healthy sleep of vigorous manhood, their brains busy with the fantastic madness of a hundred dreams, and little recking of the inevitable morrow. There, in his sleep, the white man saw his native village, with its tall, wind-swayed elms, and the grey old church that for centuries had watched the last slumber of

his race : the Kafir, the sunny slope of fair Natal, with the bright light dancing on his cattle's horns, and the green of the gardens where for his well-being his wives and children toiled. To some that night came dreams of high ambition, of brave adventure, crowned with the perfect triumph we never reach : to some, visions of beloved faces long since passed away : to some, the reflected light of a far-off home, and echoes of the happy laughter of little children. And so their lamps wavered hither and thither in the spiritual breath of sleep, flickering wildly, ere they went out for ever.

The night-wind swept in sad gusts across Isandhlwana's plain, tossing the green grass which to-morrow would be red. It moaned against Inslhazatze's mountain and died upon Upindo, fanning the dark faces of a host of warriors who rested there upon

their spears, sharpened for the coming slaughter. And as it breathed upon them they turned, those brave soldiers of U' Cetywayo—‘born to be killed,’ as their saying runs, at Cetywayo’s bidding—and grasping their assegais, raised themselves to listen. It was nothing, death was not yet ; death for the morrow, sleep for the night.

A little after one o’clock on the morning of the 22nd of January, Ernest was roused by the sound of a horse’s hoofs and the harsh challenge of the sentries. ‘Despatch from Major Dartnell,’ was the answer, and the messenger passed on. Half-an-hour more and the reveille was sounded, and the camp hummed in the darkness like a hive of bees making ready for the dawn.

Soon it was known that the General and Colonel Glynn were about to move out to the support of Major Dartnell, who reported

a large force of the enemy in front of him, with six companies of the second battalion of the 24th Regiment, four guns, and the mounted infantry.

At dawn they left.

At eight o'clock a report arrived from a picquet, stationed about a mile away on a hill to the north of the camp, that a body of Zulus was approaching from the north-east.

At nine o'clock the enemy showed over the crest of the hills for a few minutes, and then disappeared.

At ten o'clock Colonel Durnford arrived from Rorke's Drift with a rocket battery and two hundred and fifty mounted native soldiers, and took over the command of the camp from Colonel Pulleine. As he came up he stopped for a minute to speak to Alston, whom he knew, and Ernest noticed him. He was a handsome, soldierlike man,

with his arm in a sling, a long fair moustache, and restless, anxious expression of face.

At ten-thirty Colonel Durnford's force, divided into two portions, was, with the rocket battery, pushed some miles forward to ascertain the enemy's movements, and a company of the 24th was directed to take up a position on the hill about a mile to the north of the camp. Meanwhile the enemy, which they afterwards heard consisted of the Undi Corps, the Nokenke and Umcitu Regiments, and the Nkobamakosi and Imbonambi Regiments, in all about twenty thousand men, were resting about two miles from Isandhlwana, with no intention of attacking that day. They had not yet been 'moutied' (doctored), and the condition of the moon was not propitious.

Unfortunately, however, Colonel Durnford's mounted Basutus, in pushing forward, came upon a portion of the Umcitu Regi-

ment, and fired on it, whereupon the Umcitu came into action, driving Durnford's Horse before them, and then engaged the company of the 24th, which had been stationed on the hill to the north of the camp, and after stubborn resistance annihilating it. It was followed by the Nokenke, Imbonambi, and Nkomabakosi Regiments, who executed a flanking movement and threatened the front of the camp. For a while the Undi Corps, which formed the chest of the army, held its ground. Then it marched off to the right, and directed its course to the north of Isandhlwana mountain, with the object of turning the position.

Meanwhile, the remaining companies of the 24th were advanced to various positions in front of the camp, and engaged the enemy, for a while holding him in check; the two guns under Major Smith shelling the Nokenke Regiment, which formed his

left centre, with great effect. The shells could be seen bursting amidst the dense masses of Zulus, who were coming on slowly and in perfect silence, making large gaps in their ranks, which instantly closed up over the dead.

At this point the advance of the Undi Regiment to the Zulu right and the English left was reported ; and Alston's Horse was ordered to proceed, and if possible to check it. Accordingly they left, and riding behind the company of the 24th on the hill, to the north of the camp, which was now hotly engaged with the Umcitu, and Durnford's Basutus, who, fighting splendidly, were slowly being pushed back, made for the north side of Isandhlwana. As soon as they got on to the high ground, they caught sight of the Undi, who, something over three thousand strong, were running swiftly in a formation of companies, about half a mile away to the northward.

‘By Heaven! they mean to turn the mountain, and seize the waggon-road,’ said Mr. Alston. ‘Gallop!’

The troop dashed down the slope towards a pass in a stony ridge, which would command the path of the Undi, as they did so breaking through and killing two or three of a thin line of Zulus, that formed the extreme point of one of the horns or nippers, by means of which the enemy intended to enclose the camp and crush it.

After this, Alston’s Horse saw nothing more of the general fight; but it may be as well to briefly relate what happened. The Zulus of the various regiments pushed slowly on towards the camp, notwithstanding their heavy losses. Their object was to give time to the horns or nippers to close round it. Meanwhile, those in command realized too late the extreme seriousness of the position, and began to concentrate the

various companies. Too late ! The enemy saw that the nippers had closed. He knew, too, that the Undi could not be far off the waggon-road, the only way of retreat ; and so, abandoning his silence, and his slow advance, he raised the Zulu war-shout, and charged in from a distance of from six to eight hundred yards.

Up to this time the English loss had been small, for the shooting of the Zulus was vile. The Zulus, on the contrary, had, especially during the last half-hour before they charged, lost heavily. But now the tables turned. First the Natal Contingent, seeing that they were surrounded, bolted, and laid open the right and rear flank of the troops. In poured the Zulus, so that most of the soldiers had not even time to fix bayonets. In another minute, our men were being assegaied right and left, and the retreat on the camp had be-

come a fearful rout. But even then there was nowhere to run to. The Undi Corps (which afterwards passed on and attacked the post at Rorke's Drift) already held the waggon-road, and the only practical way of retreat was down a gully to the south of the road. Into this the broken fragments of the force plunged wildly, and after them and mixed up with them went their Zulu foes, massacring every living thing they came across.

So the camp was cleared. When, a couple of hours afterwards, Commandant Lonsdale, of Lonsdale's Horse, was sent back by General Chelmsford to ascertain what the firing was about, he could see nothing wrong. The tents were standing, the waggons were there; there were even soldiers moving about. It did not occur to him that it was the soldiers' *coats* which were moving on the backs of Kafirs;

and that the soldiers themselves would never move again. So he rode quickly up to the head-quarter tents ; out of which, to his surprise, there suddenly stalked a huge, naked Zulu, smeared all over with blood, and waving in his hand a bloody assegai.

Having seen enough, he then rode back again to tell the General that his camp was taken.

To God's good providence, and Cety-wayo's clemency, rather than to our own wisdom, do we owe it that all the outlying homesteads in Natal were not laid in ashes, and men, women, and children put to the assegai.

CHAPTER VI.

THE END OF ALSTON'S HORSE.

ALSTON'S Horse soon reached the ridge, past which the Undi were commencing to run, at a distance of about 350 yards, and the order was given to dismount and line it. This they did, one man in every four keeping a few paces back to hold the horses of his section. Then they opened fire; and next second came back the sound of the thudding of the bullets on the shields and bodies of the Zulu warriors.

Ernest, seated up high on his great black horse, 'the Devil,' for the officers did not dismount, could see how terrible

was the effect of that raking fire, delivered as it was, not by raw English boys, who scarcely know one end of a rifle from the other, but by men, all of whom could shoot, and many of whom were crack shots. All along the line of the Undi companies men threw up their arms and dropped dead, or staggered out of the ranks wounded. But the main body never paused. By-and-by they would come back and move the wounded, or kill them if they were not likely to recover.

Soon, as the range got longer, the fire began to be less deadly, and Ernest could see that fewer men were dropping.

‘Ernest,’ said Alston, galloping up to him, ‘I am going to charge them. Look, they will soon cross the donga, and reach the slopes of the mountain, and we sha’n’t be able to follow them on the broken ground.’

‘Isn’t it rather risky?’ asked Ernest,

somewhat dismayed at the idea of launching their little clump of mounted men at the moving mass before them.

‘Risky ; yes, of course it is, but my orders were to delay the enemy as much as possible, and the horses are fresh. But, my lad’—and he bent towards him and spoke low—‘it doesn’t much matter whether we are killed charging or running away. I am sure that the camp must be taken ; there is no hope. Good-bye, Ernest ; if I fall fight the corps as long as possible, and kill as many of those devils as you can, and if you survive remember to make off well to the left. The regiments will have passed by then. God bless you, my boy. Now order the bugler to sound the “cease fire,” and let the men mount.’

‘Yes, sir.’

They were the last words Alston ever spoke to him, and Ernest often remembered,

with affectionate admiration, that even at that moment he thought more of his friend's safety than he did of his own. As to their tenour, Ernest had already suspected the truth, though, luckily, the suspicion had not as yet impregnated the corps. Mazook, too, who as usual was with him, mounted on a Basutu pony, had just informed him, that in his (Mazook's) opinion, they were all as good as ripped up (alluding to the Zulu habit of cutting a dead enemy open), and adding a consolatory remark to the effect that man can die but once, and 'good job too.'

But, strangely enough, he did not feel afraid; indeed, he never felt quieter in his life than he did in that hour of near death. A wild expectancy thrilled his nerves, and looked out of his eyes. 'What would it be like?' he wondered. And in another minute all such thoughts were gone, for

he was at the head of his troop, ready for the order.

Alston, followed by the boy Roger, galloped swiftly round, seeing that the formation was right, and then gave the word to unsheathe the short swords with which he had insisted upon the corps being armed. Meanwhile, the Undi were drawing on to a flat plain, four hundred yards or more broad, at the foot of the mountain, a very suitable spot for a cavalry manœuvre.

‘Now, men of Alston’s Horse, there is the enemy before you. Let me see how you can go through them. Charge !’

‘Charge !’ re-echoed Ernest.

‘Charge !’ roared Sergeant-Major Jones, brandishing his sword.

Down the slope they go, slowly at first; now they are on the plain, and the pace quickens to a hand-gallop.

Ernest feels his great horse gather himself together and spring along beneath him ; he hears the hum of astonishment rising from the dense black mass before them as it halts to receive the attack ; he glances round, and sees the set faces and determined look upon the features of his men, and his blood boils up with a wild exhilaration, and for a while he tastes the fierce joy of war

Quicker still grows the pace ; now he can see the white round the dark eyeballs of the Zulus.

'Crash !' they are among them, trampling them down, hewing them down, thrusting, slashing, stabbing, and being stabbed. The air is alive with assegais, and echoes with the savage Zulu war-cries and with the shouts of the gallant troopers, fighting now as troopers have not often fought before. Presently, as in a dream, Ernest sees

a huge Zulu seize Alston's horse by the bridle, jerk it on to its haunches, and raise his assegai. Then the boy Roger, who is by his father's side, makes a point with his sword, and runs the Zulu through. He falls, but next moment the lad is attacked by more, is assegaied, and falls fighting bravely. Then Alston pulls up, and turning, shoots with his revolver at the men who have killed his son. Two fall, another runs up, and with a shout drives a great spear right through Alston, so that it stands out a handbreadth behind his back. On to the body of his son he, too, falls and dies. Next second the Zulu's head is cleft in twain down to the chin. That was Jeremy's stroke.

All this time they are travelling on, leaving a broad red lane of dead and dying in their track. Presently it was done ; they had passed right through the Impi. But, out of sixty-four men they had lost their

captain and twenty troopers. As they emerged Ernest noticed that his sword was dripping blood, and his sword-hand stained red. Yet he could not at the moment remember having killed anybody.

But Alston was dead, and he was now in command of what remained of the corps. They were in no condition to charge again, for many horses and some men were wounded. So he led them round the rear of the Impi, which, detaching a company of about three hundred men to deal with the remnants of the troop, went on its way with lessened numbers, and filled with admiration at the exhibition of a courage in no way inferior to their own.

This company, running swiftly, took possession of the ridge, down which the troop had charged, and by which alone it would be possible for Ernest to retreat, and, taking shelter behind stones, began to pour

in an inaccurate but galling fire on the little party of whites. Ernest charged up through them, losing two more men and several horses in the process; but what was his horror on reaching the crest of the ridge, to see about a thousand Zulus, drawn up, apparently in reserve, in the neck of the pass leading to the plain beyond. To escape through them would be almost impossible, for he was crippled with wounded and dismounted men, and the pace of a force is the pace of the slowest. Their position was desperate, and, looking round at his men, he could see that they thought so too.

His resolution was soon taken. A few paces from where he had for a moment halted the remainder of the corps, was a little eminence, something like an early Saxon tumulus. To this he rode, and dismounting, turned his horse loose, ordering his men to do the same. So good was

the discipline, and so great his control over them, that there were no wild rushes to escape: they obeyed, realizing their desperate case, and formed a ring round the rise.

‘Now, men of Alston’s Horse,’ said Ernest, ‘we have done our best, let us die our hardest.’

The men set up a cheer, and next minute the Zulus, creeping up under shelter of the rocks which were strewn around, attacked them with fury.

In five minutes, in spite of the withering fire which they poured in upon the surrounding Zulus, six more of the little band were dead. Four were shot, two were killed in a rush made by about a dozen men, who, reckless of their own life, determined to break through the white man’s ring. They perished in the attempt, but not before they had stabbed two of Alston’s Horse. The remainder, but little more than thirty men,

retired a few paces further up the little rise so as to contract their circle, and kept up a ceaseless fire upon the enemy. The Zulus, thanks to the accurate shooting of the white men, had by this time lost more than fifty of their number, and, annoyed at being put to such loss by a foe numerically so insignificant, they determined to end the matter with a rush. Ernest saw their leader, a great, almost naked fellow, with a small shield and a necklace of lion's claws, walking, utterly regardless of the pitiless rifle-fire, from group to group, and exhorting them. Taking up a rifle which had just fallen from the hand of a dead trooper—for up to the present Ernest had not joined in the firing—he took a fine sight at about eighty yards at the Zulu chief's broad chest, and pulled. The shot was a good one; the great fellow sprang into the air and dropped. Instantly another

commander took his place, and the final advance began.

But the Zulus had to come up-hill, with but little cover, and scores were mown down by the scorching and continuous fire from the breech-loaders. Twice when within twenty yards were they driven back, twice did they come on again. Now they were but twelve paces or so away, and a murderous fire was kept up upon them. For a moment they wavered, then pushed forward up the slope.

‘Close up !’ shouted Ernest, ‘and use your swords and pistols.’ His voice was heard above the din; some of the men dropped the now useless rifles, and the revolvers began to crack.

Then the Zulus closed in upon the doomed band, with a shout of ‘Bulala Umlungo’ (kill the white man).

Out rung the pistol-shots, and fire flew

from the clash of swords and assegais, and still the little band, momentarily growing fewer, fought on with labouring breath. Never did hope-forsaken men make a more gallant stand. Still they fought, and still they fell, one by one, and as they fell were stabbed to death ; but scarcely one of them was there whose death-wound was in his back.

At last the remaining Zulus drew back : they thought that it was done.

But no : three men yet stood together upon the very summit of the mound, holding six foes at bay. The Zulu captain laughed aloud when he saw it, and gave a rapid order. Thereupon the remaining Zulus formed up, and, stabbing the wounded as they went, departed swiftly over the dead, after the main body of the corps which had now vanished round the mountain.

They left the six to finish the three.

Three hundred had come to attack Alston's Horse ; not more than one hundred departed from that attack. The overpowered white men had rendered a good account of their foes.

The three left alive on the summit of the little hill were, as Fate would have it, Ernest, Jeremy, and the ex-sailor, who had complained of the 'sargistic' companion, who as it happened had just died by his side.

Their revolvers were empty ; Ernest's sword had broken off short in the body of a Zulu ; Jeremy still had his sword, and the sailor a clubbed carbine.

Presently one of the six Zulus dodged in under the carbine, and ran the sailor through. Glancing round Ernest saw his face turn grey. The honest fellow died as he had lived, swearing hard.

'Ah, you —— black mate,' he sung out ; 'take that, and be d—d to you !' The

clubbed rifle came down upon the Zulu's skull and cracked it to bits, and both fell dead together.

Now there were five Zulus left and only Ernest and Jeremy to meet them. But stay ; suddenly from under a corpse uprises another foe. No, it is not a foe, it is Mazooku, who has been shamming dead, but suddenly and most opportunely shows himself to be very much alive. Advancing from behind, he stabs one of the attacking party, and kills him. That leaves four. Then he engages another, and after a long struggle kills him too, which leaves three. And still the two white men stand back to back, with flashing eyes, and gasping breath, and hold their own. Soaked with blood, desperate, and expecting death, they were yet a gallant sight to see. Two of the remaining Zulus rush at the giant Jeremy, one at Ernest. Ernest, having no effective weapon left,

dodges the assegai-thrust, and then closes with his antagonist, and they roll, over and over, down the hill together, struggling for the assegai the Zulu holds. It snaps in two, but the blade and about eight inches of shaft remain with Ernest. He drives it through his enemy's throat, and he dies. Then he struggles up to see the closing scene of the drama, but not in time to help in it. Mazooku has wounded his man badly, and is following him to kill him. And Jeremy ? He has struck at one of the Kafirs with his sword. The blow is received on the edge of the cowhide shield, and sinks half-way through it, so that the hide holds the steel fast. With a sharp twist of the shield the weapon is jerked out of his hand, and he is left defenceless, with nothing to trust to except his native strength. Surely he is lost ! But no—with a sudden rush he seizes both Zulus by the throat, one in each hand, and,

strong men as they are, swings them wide apart. Then with a tremendous effort he jerks their heads together with such awful force that they fall senseless, and Mazooku comes up and spears them.

Thus was the fight ended.

Ernest and Jeremy sank upon the bloody grass, gasping for breath. The firing from the direction of the camp had now died away, and after the tumult, the shouts, and the shrieks of the dying, the silence seemed deep. It was the silence of the dead.

There they lay, white man and Zulu, side by side in the peaceable sunlight ; and in a vague, bewildered way Ernest noticed that the faces which a few minutes before had looked so grim, were mostly smiling now. They had passed through the ivory gates, and reached the land of Smiles. How still they all were ! A little black and white

bird, such as fly from ant-hill to ant-hill, came and settled upon the forehead of a young fellow scarcely more than a boy, and the only son of his mother, who lay quiet across two Zulus. The bird knew why he was so still. Ernest had liked the boy, and knew his mother, and began to wonder as he lay panting on the grass what she would feel when she heard of her son's fate. But just then Mazook's voice broke the silence. He had been standing staring at the body of one of the men he had killed, and was now apostrophizing it in Zulu.

“ Ah, my brother,’ he said, ‘ son of my own father, with whom I used to play when I was little ; I always told you that you were a perfect fool with an assegai, but I little thought that I should ever have such an opportunity of proving it to you. Well, it can't be helped ; duty is duty, and family ties must give way to it. Sleep well, my

brother ; it was painful to have to kill you —very.'

Ernest lifted himself from the ground, and laughed the hysterical laugh of shattered nerves, at this *naïve* and thoroughly Zulu moralizing. Just then Jeremy rose and came up to him. He was a fearful sight to see—his hands, his face, his clothes, were all *red* ; and he was bleeding from a cut on the face, and another on the hand.

' Come, Ernest,' he said in a hollow voice, ' we must clear out of this.'

' I suppose so,' said Ernest.

On the plain at the foot of the hill several of the horses were quietly cropping the grass, till such time as the superior animal, man, had settled his differences. Amongst them was Ernest's black stallion, ' The Devil ! ' which had been wounded, though slightly, on the flank. They walked towards the horses, stopping on their way

to arm themselves from the weapons which lay about. As they passed the body of the man Ernest had killed in his last struggle for life, he stopped and drew the broken assegai from his throat. 'A memento,' said he. The horses were caught without difficulty, and 'The Devil' and the two next best animals selected. Then they mounted, and rode towards the top of the ridge over which Ernest had seen the body of Zulus lying in reserve. When they were near it Mazook got down and crept to the crest on his stomach. Presently, to their great relief, he signalled to them to advance: the Zulus had moved on, and the valley was deserted. And so the three passed back over the neck, that an hour and a half before they had crossed with sixty-one companions, who were now all dead.

'I think we have charmed lives,' said Jeremy presently.

‘All gone except us two. It can't be chance.’

‘It is fate,’ said Ernest briefly.

From the top of the neck they got a view of the camp, which now looked quiet and peaceful, with its white tents and its Union Jack fluttering as usual in the breeze.

‘They must be all dead too,’ said Ernest ; ‘which way shall we go ?’

Then it was that Mazook’s knowledge of the country proved of the utmost service to them. He had been brought up at a Kraal in the immediate neighbourhood, and knew every inch of the land. Avoiding the camp altogether, he led them to the left of the battle-field, and after two hours’ ride over rough country, brought them to a ford of the Buffalo which he was acquainted with, some miles below where the few survivors of the massacre struggled across the river, or were drowned in attempting

to do so. Following this route they never saw a single Zulu, for these had all departed in the other direction, and were spared the horrors of the stampede and of 'Fugitives' Drift.'

At last they gained the further side of the river, and were, comparatively speaking, safe, on Natal ground.

They determined after much anxious consultation to make for the little fort at Helpmakaar, and had ridden about a mile or so towards it, when suddenly the Zulu's quick ear caught the sound of distant firing to their right. It was their enemy the Undi Corps attacking Rorke's Drift. Leaving Mazook to hold the horses, Ernest and Jeremy dismounted and climbed a solitary Koppie or hill which just there cropped out from the surface of the plain. It was of an ironstone formation, and on the summit lay a huge flat slab of almost pure ore.

On to this they climbed, and looked along the course of the river, but could see nothing. Rorke's Drift was hidden by a rise in the ground. All this time a dense thunder-cloud had been gathering in the direction of Helpmakaar, and was now, as is common before sunset in the South African summer season, travelling rapidly up against the wind, set in a faint rainbow as in a frame. The sun, on the other hand, was sinking towards the horizon, so that his golden beams, flying across a space of blue sky, impinged upon the black bosom of the cloud, and were reflected thence in sharp lights and broad shadows, flung like celestial spears and shields, across the plains of Zululand. Isandhlwana's mountain was touched by one great ray which broke in glory upon his savage crest, and crowned him that day's king of death, but the battle-field o'er which he towered was draped in gloom. It was a

glorious scene. Above, the wild expanse of sky broken up by flaming clouds and tinted with hues such as might be reflected from the jewelled walls of heaven. Behind, the angry storm, set in its rainbow-frame like ebony in a ring of gold. In front, the rolling plain where the tall grasses waved, the broad Buffalo flashing through it like a silver snake, the sun-kissed mountains, and the shadowed slopes.

It was a glorious scene. Nature in her most splendid mood flung all her colour-streamers loose across the earth and sky, and waved them wildly ere they vanished into night's abyss. Life, in his most radiant ecstasy, blazed up in varied glory before he sank, like a lover, to sleep awhile in the arms of his eternal mistress—Death.

Ernest gazed upon it, and it sank into his heart, which, set to Nature's tune, responded ever when her hands swept the

cords of earth or heaven. It lifted him above the world, and thrilled him with indescribable emotion. His eyes wandered over the infinite space above, searching for the presence of a God; then they fell upon Isandhlwana, and marked the spot just where the shadows were deepest; where his comrades lay and gazed upon the glorious sky with eyes that could not see, and at last his spirit gave, and weakened with emotion and long toil and abstinence, he burst into a paroxysm of grief.

‘Oh, Jeremy,’ he sobbed, ‘they are all dead, all, except you and I, and I feel a coward that I should still live to weep over them. When it was over, I should have let that Zulu kill me, but I was a coward, and I fought for my life. Had I but held my hand for a second I should have gone with Alston and the others, Jeremy.’

‘Come, come, old fellow, you did your

best, and fought the corps like a brick. No man could have done more.'

'Yes, Jeremy, but I should have died with them ; it was my duty to die. And I do not care about living, and they did. I have been an unfortunate dog all my life. I shot my cousin, I lost Eva, and now I have seen all my comrades killed, and I, who was their leader, alone escaped. And perhaps I have not done with my misfortunes yet. What next, I wonder ; what next ?'

Ernest's distress was so acute, that Jeremy, looking at him and seeing that all he had gone through had been too much for him, tried to soothe him, lest he should go into hysterics, by putting his arm round his waist and giving him a good hug.

'Look here, old chap,' he said ; 'it is no use bothering one's head about these things. We are just so many feathers

blown about by the wind, and must float where the wind blows us. Sometimes it is a good wind, and sometimes a bad one, but on the whole it is bad, and we must just make the best of it, and wait till it doesn't think it worth while to blow our particular feathers about any more, and then we shall come to the ground, and not till then. And now, we have been up here for more than five minutes, and given the horses a bit of a rest. We must be pushing on if we want to get to Helpmakaar before dark, and I only hope we shall get there before the Zulus, that's all. By Jove, here comes the storm—come on!—and Jeremy jumped off the lump of iron ore and began to descend the Koppie.

Ernest, who had been listening with his face in his hands, rose and followed him in silence. As he did so, a breath of ice-cold air from the storm-cloud, which was now

right overhead, fanned his hot brow, and when he had gone a few yards he turned to meet it, and to cast one more look at the scene.

It was the last earthly landscape he ever saw. For at that instant there leapt from the cloud overhead a fierce stream of jagged light, which struck the mass of iron ore on which they had been seated, shivered and fused it, and then ran down the side of the hill to the plain. Together with the lightning there came an ear-splitting crack of thunder.

Jeremy, who was now nearly at the bottom of the little hill, staggered at the shock. When he recovered, he looked up where Ernest had been standing, and could not see him. He rushed up the hill again, calling him in accents of frantic grief. There was no answer. Presently he found him lying on the ground, white and still.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CLIFFS OF OLD ENGLAND.

IT was an April evening; off the south coast of England. The sun had just made up his mind to struggle out from behind a particularly black shower-cloud, and give that part of the world a look before he bade it good night.

‘That is lucky,’ said a little man, who was with difficulty hanging on to the bulwark netting of the R.M.S. ‘Conway Castle;’ ‘now, Mr. Jones, look if you can’t see them in the sunlight.’

Mr. Jones accordingly looked through his glasses again.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I can see them distinctly.’

‘See what?’ asked another passenger coming up.

‘The cliffs of old England,’ answered the little man joyously.

‘Oh, is that all?’ said the other; ‘curse the cliffs of old England!’

‘Nice remark that for a man who is going home to be married, eh?’ said the little man, turning to where his companion had stood.

But Mr. Jones had shut up his glasses, and vanished aft.

Presently he reached a deck-cabin, and entered without knocking.

‘England is in sight, old fellow,’ he said, addressing somebody who lay back smoking in a cane-chair.

The person addressed made a movement as though to rise, then put up his hand to a shade that covered his eyes.

‘I forgot,’ he answered with a smile; ‘it

will have to be very much in sight before I can see it. By the way, Jeremy,' he went on nervously, 'I want to ask you something. These doctors tell such lies.' And he removed the shade. 'Now, look at my eyes, and tell me honestly, am I disfigured? Are they shrunk, I mean, or got a squint, or anything of that sort?'—and Ernest turned up his dark orbs, which, except that they had acquired that painful expectant look peculiar to the blind, were just as they always had been.

Jeremy looked at them, first in one light, then in another.

'Well,' said Ernest impatiently, 'I can feel that you are staring me out of countenance.'

'Hamba gachle,' replied the imperturbable one. 'I am di—di—diagnosing the case. There, that will do. To all appearance, your optics are as sound as mine. You

get a girl to look at them, and see what she says.'

'Ah, well ; that is something to be thankful for.'

Just then somebody knocked at the cabin-door. It was a steward.

'You sent for me, Sir Ernest ?'

'Oh yes, I remember. Will you be so good as to find my servant ? I want him.'

'Yes, Sir Ernest.'

Ernest moved impatiently. 'Confound that fellow, with his everlasting "Sir Ernest."

'What, haven't you got used to your handle yet ?'

'No, I haven't, and I wish it were at Jericho, and that is a fact. It is all your fault, Jeremy. If you had not told that confoundedly garrulous little Doctor, who went and had the information printed in the 'Natal Mercury,' it would never have

come out at all. I could have dropped the title in England ; but now all these people know that I am Sir Ernest, and Sir Ernest I shall remain for the rest of my days.'

' Well, most people would not think that such a dreadful misfortune.'

' Yes, they would if they had happened to shoot the real heir. By the way, what did the lawyer say in his letter ? As we are so near home, I suppose I had better post myself up. You will find it in the despatch-box. Read it, there's a good fellow.'

Jeremy opened the box, battered with many years of travel, and searched about for the letter. It contained a curious collection of articles—prominent among which was a handkerchief, which had once belonged to Eva Ceswick ; a long tress of chestnut hair tied up with a blue ribbon ; ditto of golden, which had come—well, not from Eva's tresses ; a whole botanical collec-

tion of dead flowers, tender souvenirs of goodness knows who, for, after a while, these accumulated dried specimens are difficult to identify ; and many letters and other curiosities.

At last, he came to the desired document, written in a fair clerk's hand ; and having shovelled back the locks of hair, &c., began to read it aloud.

'St. Ethelred's Court.

'Poultry, 22nd Jan., 1879.

‘SIR,’—

‘You see,’ broke in Ernest, ‘while we were fighting over there at Sanshlwana, those beggars were writing to tell me that I was a baronet. Case of the “bloody hand” with a vengeance, eh ?’

‘SIR,’ began Jeremy again,

‘It is our duty to inform you of the death, on the 16th of the present month, of our esteemed client, Sir Hugh

Kershaw, Bart., of Archdale Hall, Devonshire, and of the consequent devolution of the Baronetcy to yourself, as only son of the late Sir Hugh's only brother, Ernest Kershaw, Esq.

‘ Into the question of the unhappy manner in which you came to be placed in the immediate succession, it does not become us to enter. We have before us at this moment a copy of Her Majesty’s pardon, granted to you under the Transvaal Amnesty Act, and forwarded to us by Reginald Cardus, Esq., of Dum’s Ness, Suffolk, which we have neither the wish nor the will to dispute. It is clear to us, that under this pardon, you are totally free from any responsibility for the breach of the law which you perpetrated some years since; and of this it is our duty to advise you. Your title to succeed is a clear one.

‘ As was only to be expected under the circumstances, the late Sir Hugh did not bear any feeling of good-will towards you. Indeed, we do not think that we shall be exaggerating if we say that the news of

your free pardon materially hastened his end. On the attainment of full age by the late Hugh Kershaw, Esq., who fell by your hand, the entail of the family estates was cut, and only the mansion-house of Archdale Hall, the heirlooms, which are numerous and valuable, therein contained, and the deer-park, consisting of one hundred and eighty-five acres of land, were resettled. These consequently pass to you, and we shall be glad to receive your instructions concerning them, should you elect to honour us with your confidence. The estates pass, under the will of the late baronet, to a distant cousin of his late wife's, James Smith, Esq., of 52, Camperdown Road, Upper Clapham. We now think that we have put you in possession of all the facts connected with your accession to the baronetcy, and awaiting your instructions, have the honour to remain,

‘ Your obedient servants,

(Signed) ‘ PAISLEY & PAISLEY.’

‘ Ah, so much for that,’ was Ernest's comment. ‘ What am I to do with Archdale

Hall, its heirlooms, and its deer-park of 185 acres, I wonder? I shall sell them, if I can. Mine is a pretty position; a baronet with about sixpence half-penny per annum to support my rank on; a very pretty position!'

'Hamba gachle,' replied Jeremy; 'time enough to consider all that. But now, as we are on the reading lay, I may as well give you the benefit of my correspondence with the officer commanding H.M.'s. forces in Natal and Zululand.'

'Fire away,' remarked Ernest, wearily.

'First letter, dated Newcastle, Natal, 27 January, from your humble servant to Officer commanding, &c.'

"SIR,

"I have the honour to report, by order of Lieutenant and Adjutant Kershaw, of Alston's Horse, at present incapacitated by lightning from doing so himself"—

‘Very neatly put that, I think,’ interpolated Jeremy.

‘Very. Go on.’

—“that on the 22nd inst., Alston’s Horse having received orders to check the flanking movement of the Undi Corps, proceeded to try and do so. Coming to a ridge commanding the advance of the Undi, the corps, by order of their late commander, Captain Alston, dismounted and opened fire on them at a distance of about three hundred yards, with considerable effect. This did not, however, check the Undi, who appeared to number between three and four thousand men, so Captain Alston issued an order to charge the enemy. This was done with some success. The Zulus lost a number of men; the corps, which passed right through the enemy, about twenty troopers, Captain Alston, and his son Roger Alston, who acted as his aide-de-camp. Several horses and one or two men were also severely wounded, which crippled the further movements of the corps.

“ Lieutenant and Adjutant Kershaw, on taking command of the corps, determined to attempt to retreat. In this attempt, however, he failed, owing to the presence of dismounted and wounded men; to the detachment of a body of about three hundred Zulus to intercept any such retreat; and to the presence of a large body of Zulus on the further side of the pass, leading to the valley through which such retreat must be conducted.

“ Under these circumstances he determined to fight the remains of the corps to the last, and dismounting them, took possession of a fairly advantageous position. A desperate hand-to-hand encounter ensued. It ended in the almost total extermination of Alston's Horse, and in that of the greater part of the attacking Zulus. The names of the surviving members of Alston's Horse, are:—Lieutenant and Adjutant Kershaw; Serjeant-Major Jeremy Jones; Trooper Mazooku (the only native in the corps).

“ These ultimately effected their escape, the enemy having either been all destroyed

or having followed the track of the Undi. Lieutenant and Adjutant Kershaw regrets to have to state that in process of effecting his escape he was struck by lightning and blinded.

“ He estimates the total loss inflicted on the enemy by Alston's Horse at from four hundred to four hundred and fifty men. In face of such determined bravery as was evinced by every one of his late gallant comrades, Lieutenant Kershaw feels that it would be invidious for him to mention any particular names. Every man fought desperately, and died with his face to the enemy. He begs to enclose a return of the names of those lost, the accuracy of which he cannot, however, guarantee, as it is compiled from memory, the papers of the corps having all been lost. Trusting that the manœuvres attempted by Lieutenant Kershaw under somewhat difficult circumstances will meet with your approval, I have, &c.

By order of Lieutenant Kershaw.

(Signed) “ JEREMY JONES, SERGEANT-
MAJOR.”

‘ Then follows the reply, dated Maritzburg, 2 Feb.

“ “ SIR,

“ “ 1. I have to direct you to convey to Lieutenant and Adjutant Kershaw, and the surviving members of the corps known as Alston’s Horse, the high sense entertained by the Officer, &c., of the gallant conduct of that corps in the face of overwhelming odds at Isandhlwana on the 22nd of January.

“ “ 2. It is with deep regret that the Officer, &c., learns of the heavy misfortune which has befallen Lieutenant Kershaw. He wishes to express his appreciation of the way in which that officer handled the remnants of his corps, and to inform him that his name will be forwarded to the proper quarter for the expression of Her Majesty’s pleasure with regard to his services.¹

¹ It may be stated here, that if this was ever done, the War Office did not consider Ernest’s services worthy of notice, for he never heard anything more about them.

““3. I am directed to offer you a commission in any of the volunteer corps now on service in this campaign.

““I have, &c.,

(Signed) ““CHIEF OF THE STAFF.””

Then comes a letter from Sergeant-Major Jones, gratefully acknowledging the expression of the high opinion of the Officer, &c., and declining the offer of a commission in another volunteer corps.

Next is a private letter from the Officer, &c., offering to recommend Sergeant-Major Jeremy Jones for a commission in the army.

And finally, a letter from Sergeant-Major Jones to Officer, &c., gratefully declining the same.

Ernest looked up sharply. The *raison d'être* of the movement was gone, for he could no longer see, but the habit remained.

“Why did you decline the commission, Jeremy ?”

Jeremy moved uneasily, and looked through the little cabin-window.

‘On general principles,’ he answered presently.

‘Nonsense ; I know you would have liked to go into the army. Don’t you remember, as we were riding up to the camp at Isandhlwana, you said that you proposed that if the corps did anything, we should try and work it.’

‘Yes.’

‘Well.’

‘Well, I said *we*.’

‘I don’t quite follow you, Jeremy.’

‘My dear Ernest, you can’t go in for a commission now, can you ?’

Ernest laughed a little bitterly.

‘What has that to do with it ?’

‘Everything. I am not going to leave

you in your misfortune to go and enjoy myself in the army. I could not do it; I should be wretched if I did. No, old fellow, we have gone through a good many things side by side, and, please God, we will stick to each other to the end of the chapter.'

Ernest was always easily touched by kindness, especially now that his nerves were shaken, and his heart softened by misfortune, and his eyes filled with tears at Jeremy's words. Putting out his hand, he felt about for Jeremy's, and when he had found it, grasped it warmly.

'If I have troubles, Jeremy, at least I have a blessing that few can boast—a true friend. If you had gone with the rest at Isandhlwana yonder, I think that my heart would have broken. I think we do bear one another a love that "passeth the love of woman." It would not be worth much if it

didn't, that is one thing. I wonder if Absalom was a finer fellow than you are, Jeremy ; "from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." Your hair would not weigh "two hundred shekels after the king's weight" though (Jeremy wore his hair cropped like a convict's) ; but I would back you to throw Absalom over your shoulder, hair and all.'

It was his fashion to talk nonsense when affected by anything, and Jeremy, knowing it, said nothing.

Just then there came a knock at the door, and who should enter but Mazook, but Mazook transformed. His massive frame, instead of being clothed in the loose white garments he generally wore, was arrayed in a flannel shirt with an enormous stick-up collar, a suit of pepper-and-salt reach-me-downs several sizes too small for him, and a pair of boots considerably too

large for his small and shapely feet, for, like those of most Zulus of good blood, his hands and feet were extremely delicately made.

To add to the incongruity of his appearance, on the top of his hair, which was still done in ridges Zulu fashion, and decorated with long bone snuff-spoons, was perched an extremely small and rakish-looking billycock hat, and in his hand he carried his favourite and most gigantic knobstick.

On opening the cabin-door he saluted in the ordinary fashion, and coming in squatted down on his haunches to await orders, forgetting that he was not in all the freedom of his native dress. The results were most disastrous. With a crack and a bang the reach-me-down trousers, already strained to their utmost capacity, split right up the back. The astonished Zulu flew up into the air, but

presently discovering what had happened, sat down again, remarking that there was 'much more room now.'

Jeremy burst out laughing, and having sketched his retainer's appearance for the benefit of Ernest, told him what had happened.

'Where did you get those things from, Mazook?' asked Ernest.

Mazook explained that he had bought the rig out for three pounds ten from a second class passenger, as the weather was growing cold.

'Do not wear them again. I will buy you clothes as soon as we get to England. If you are cold wear your great-coat.'

'Koos!' (chief).

'How is 'The Devil?' Ernest had brought the black stallion on which he had escaped from Isandhlwana home with him.

Mazook replied that the horse was well, but playful. A man forward had been teasing him with a bit of bread. He had waited till that man passed under his box, and had seized him in his teeth, lifted him off the ground by his coat, and shaken him severely.

‘Good! Give him a bran-mash to night.’

‘Koos!’

‘And so you find the air cold. Are you not regretting that you came? I warned you that you would regret.’

‘Ou ka Inkoos’ (oh no, my chief), the Zulu answered in his liquid native tongue.

‘When first we came upon the smoking ship, and went out on to the black water out of which the white men rise, and my bowels twisted up and melted within me, and I went through the agonies of an hundred deaths, then I regretted. “Oh why,” I said in my heart, “did not my father kill

me rather than bring me on to this great moving river? Surely if I live I shall grow like a white man from the whiteness of my heart, for I am exceedingly afraid, and have cast all my inside forth." All this I said, and many more things which I cannot remember, but they were dark and heavy things. But behold, my father, when my bowels ceased to melt, and when new ones had grown to replace those which I had thrown forth, I was glad, and did eat much beef, and then did I question my heart about this journey over the black water. And my heart answered and said, "Mazooku, son of Ingoluvu, of the tribe of the Maquilisini, of the people of the Amazulu, you have done well. Great is the chief whom you serve; great is he on the hunting-path; great was he in the battle; all the Undi could not kill him, and his brother the lion (Jeremy), and his servant the jackal

(Mazooku), who hid in a hole and then bit those who digged. Oh, yes, he is great, and his breast is full of valour ; you have seen him strike the Undi down ; and his mind is full of the white man's knowledge and discretion ; you have seen him form the ring that spat out fire so fast that his servants the horsemen were buried under the corpses of the Undi. So great is he, that the "heaven above" smelt him out as "tagati" (a wizard), and struck him with their lightning, but could not kill him then." And so now, my father wanders and wanders, and shall wander in the darkness, seeing not the sun or the stars, or the flashing of spears, or the light that gathers in the eyes of brave men as they close in the battle, or the love which gleams in the eyes of women. And how is this ? Shall my father want a dog to lead him in his darkness ? Shall his dog

Mazooku, son of Ingoluvu, prove a faithless dog, and desert the hand that fed him, and the man who is braver than himself? No, it shall not be so, my chief, and my father. By the head of Chaka, whither thou goest thither will I go also, and where you build your kraal there shall I make my hut. Koos! Baba!'

And having saluted after the dignified Zulu fashion, Mazook departed to tie up his split trousers with a bit of string. There was something utterly incongruous between his present appearance and his melodious and poetical words, instinct as they were with qualities which in some respects make the savage Zulu a gentleman, and put him above the white Christian, who for the most part regards the 'nigger' as a creature beneath contempt. For there are lessons to be learnt even from Zulu 'niggers,' and among them we may reckon

those taught by a courage which laughs at death; an absolute fidelity to those who have the right to command it, or the qualities necessary to win it; and in their raw and unconverted state, perfect honesty and truthfulness.

‘He is a good fellow, Mazook,’ said Ernest when the Zulu had gone, ‘but I fear that one of two things will happen to him: Either he will get home-sick and become a nuisance, or he will get civilised and become drunken and degraded. I should have done better to leave him in Natal.’

CHAPTER VIII.

ERNEST'S EVIL DESTINY.

ABOUT nine o'clock on the morning following Mazooku's oration a young lady came running up the stairs of the principal Plymouth hotel, and burst into a private sitting-room, like a human bomb-shell of attractive appearance, somewhat to the astonishment of a bald old gentleman who was sitting at breakfast.

‘Good gracious, Dorothy, have you gone suddenly mad?’

‘Oh, Reginald, the “Conway Castle” is nearly in, and I have been to the office and got leave for us to go off in the launch, so come along, quick.’

‘What time does the launch leave?’

‘A quarter to ten exactly.’

‘Then we have three-quarters of an hour.’

‘Oh, please, Reginald, be quick, it might go before, you know.’

Mr. Cardus smiled, and rising put on his hat and coat, ‘to oblige’ Dorothy, he said, but as a matter of fact, he was as excited as she was. There was a patch of red on each of his pale cheeks, and his hand shook.

In a quarter of an hour they were walking up and down the quay by the Custom House, waiting for the launch to start.

‘After all these years,’ said Mr. Cardus, ‘and blind!'

‘Do you think that he will be much disfigured, Reginald?’

‘I don’t know, dear; your brother said nothing about it.’

'I can hardly believe it; it seems so strange to think that he and Jeremy should have been spared out of all those people. How good God is!'

'A cynic,' replied Mr. Cardus with a smile, 'or the relations of the other people might draw a different conclusion.'

But Dorothy was thinking how good God was to *her*. She was dressed in pink that morning, and

'Oh, she looked sweet;
As the little pink flower that grows in the wheat.'

Dorothy neither was, nor ever would be, a pretty woman, but she was essentially a charming one. Her kindly, puzzled face (and to judge from the little wrinkles on it, she had never got to the bottom of the questions which contracted her forehead as a child), her steady blue eyes, her diminutive, rounded form, and above all, the indescribable light of goodness which shone

round her like a halo, all made her charming. What did it matter, if the mouth was a little wide, or the nose somewhat 'tip-tilted'? Those who can look so sweet are able to dispense with such fleshly attributes as a Grecian nose or chiseled lips. At the least, they will have the best of it after youth is past; and let me remind you, my young and lovely reader, that the longer and dustier portion of life's road winds away towards the pale horizon of our path on the further side of the grim mile-post marked '30.'

But what made her chiefly attractive was her piquante, taking manner, and the 'chic' of her presence. She was such a perfect lady.'

'All aboard, if you please,' broke in the agent. 'Run in the gangway!' and they were off towards the great grey vessel with a blue pennant at her top.

It was a short run, but it seemed long to Dorothy and the old gentleman with her. Bigger and bigger grew the great vessel, till at last it seemed to swallow up their tiny steamer.

‘ Ease her ! Look out for the line there ! Now haul away ! Make fast ! ’

It was all done in an instant, and next moment they stood upon the broad white deck, amid the crowd of passengers, and were looking round for Ernest and Jeremy.

But they were not to be seen.

‘ I hope they are here,’ faltered Dorothy.

Mr. Cardus took his hat off, and wiped his bald head. He too hoped that they were there.

At that moment Dorothy became aware of a great black man, clad in a white smock pulled on over a great-coat, and carrying a big spear and a kerrie in his hand, who was pushing his way towards them. Next

moment he stood before them saluting vigorously.

‘Koos !’ he said, thrusting the spear into the air before Mr. Cardus’ astonished nose.

‘Inkosi Casa’ (chieftainess), he repeated, going through the same process before Dorothy. ‘This way, master ; this way, missie. The chief without eyes send me to you. This way ; the lion bring him now.’

They followed him through the press towards the after part of the ship, whilst giving up the unfamiliar language he vociferated in Zulu (it might have been Sanscrit for all they knew) :

‘Make way, you low people ; make way for the old man with the shining head on whose brow sits wisdom, and the fair young maiden, the sweet rosebud, who comes, &c.’

At that moment Dorothy’s quick eye saw a great man issuing from a cabin, leading

another man by the hand. And then she forgot everything, and ran forward.

‘Oh Ernest, Ernest !’ she cried.

The blind man’s cheek flushed at the music of her voice. He drew his hand from Jeremy’s, and stretched out his arms towards the voice. It would have been easy to avoid them—one need never be kissed by a blind man—but she did not avoid them. On the contrary, she placed herself so that the groping arms closed round her, with a cry of, ‘Dolly, where are you ?’

‘Here, Ernest, here !’ and in another moment he had drawn her to him, and kissed her on the face, and she had returned the kiss. ‘Oh fie ! Dorothy, fie !’

Then she kissed Jeremy too, or rather Jeremy lifted her up two or three feet and kissed her—it came to the same thing. And then Mr. Cardus wrung them both by the

hand, wringing Ernest's the hardest, and Mazook stood by, and Zulu fashion chanted a little song of his own improvising, about how the chiefs came back to their kraal after a long expedition, in which they had, &c.,—and how Wisdom in the shape of a shining-headed and ancient one, the husband without any doubt of many wives, and the father of at least a hundred children, &c.,—and Beauty in the shape of a sweet and small one, &c., &c. ; and finally they all went very near to crying, and dancing a fling on the quarter-deck together.

And then they all talked at once, and set about collecting their things in a muddle-headed fashion, and when these had been put in a pile, and Mazook seated, assegai and all, upon the top of them as a solemn warning to thieves (and ill would it have gone with the thief who dared to meddle with that pile), started off to

inspect Ernest's great black horse 'The Devil.'

And behold, Dorothy stroked 'The Devil's' nose, and he, recognizing how sweet and good she was, abandoned his usual habits, and did not bite her, but only whinnied and asked for sugar. Then Ernest, going into the box with the horse, which nobody but he and Mazook were fond of taking liberties with, felt down his flank till he came to a scar inflicted by an assegai, in that mad charge through the Undi, and showed it to them. And Dorothy's eyes filled with tears of thankfulness, as she thought of what that horse and its rider had gone through, and of the bleaching bones of those who had galloped by their side ; and she would have liked to kiss Ernest again, only there was no excuse, so she only pressed his hand, feeling that the sorrow of the empty years which were

gone, was almost atoned for by this hour of joy.

Then they went ashore to the hotel, and sat together in the pleasant sitting-room which Dorothy had chosen, and made sweet with great bunches of violets (for she remembered that Ernest loved violets), and talked. At length Mr. Cardus and Jeremy went off to see about getting the things through the Custom-house, where they arrived to find Mazook keeping half-a-dozen gorgeous officials, who wanted to open a box, at bay with his knobsticks, and plastering them with offensive epithets which fortunately they did not understand.

‘Doll,’ said Ernest, presently, ‘it is a beautiful day, is it not? Will you take me for a walk, dear? I should like to go for a walk.’

‘Yes, Ernest, of course I will.’

‘You are sure you do not mind being

seen with a blind man ; you must give me your hand to hold, you know.'

' Ernest, how can you ?'

Mind giving him her hand to hold indeed ! thought Dorothy to herself as she ran to put her bonnet on. Oh that she could give it to him for always ! And in her heart she blessed the accident of his blindness, because it brought him so much nearer to her. He would be helpless without her, this tall strong man, and she would be ever at his side to help him. He would not be able to read a book, or write a letter, or move from room to room without her. Surely she would soon be able so to weave herself into his life, that she would become indispensable to it ! And then, perhaps—perhaps—and her heart pulsed with a joy so intense at the mere thought of what might follow, that it became a pain, and she caught her breath and leaned against

the wall. For every fibre of her little frame was thrilled with a passionate love of this blind man whom she had lost for so many years, and now had found again ; and in her breast she vowed that if she could help it she would lose him no more. Why should she ? When he had been engaged to Eva, she had done her best for him and her, and bitterly had she felt the way in which he had been treated. But Eva had taken her own course, and was now no longer in the outward and visible running, whatever place she might still hold in the inward and spiritual side of Ernest's nature. Dorothy did not underrate that place ; she knew well that the image of her rival had sunk too deep into his heart to be altogether dislodged by her. But she was prepared to put up with that. 'One can't have everything, you know,' she said, shaking her wise little head at her own

reflection in the glass, as she tied her bonnet-strings.

She was an eminently practical little person was Dorothy, and having recognized the 'eternal verity' of the saying that half a loaf is better than no bread, especially if one happens to be dying of hunger, she made up her mind to make the best of the position. Since she could not help it, Eva would be welcome to the inward and spiritual side of Ernest, if only she could secure the outward and visible side ; 'for, after all, that is real and tangible, and there isn't much comfort in spiritual affection, you know,' she said with another shake of the head.

In short, the arguments which proved so convincing to her were not unlike those that carried conviction home to the gentle breast of Mr. Plowden, when he made up his mind to marry Eva in the teeth of her engagement to, and love for, Ernest ; but,

putting aside the diversity of the circumstances, there was this difference between them : Mr. Plowden recognized no higher spiritual part at all ; he did not believe in those sort of things ; he contracted for Eva as he would have contracted to buy a lovely animal, and when he had got the given quantity of flesh and blood, he was satisfied. Of the beautiful soul which the human casket held, and which loathed and hated him, he took no account. He had got the woman, what did he care about the woman's soul ? Souls, and spiritual parts, and affinities with what is good and high, and the divinity of love, &c. &c., were capital things to preach about, but they did not apply to the affairs of every-day life. Besides, if he had been asked, he would have given it as his candid opinion that women did not possess any of these things.

There are hundreds of educated men who think like Mr. Plowden, and there are thousands of educated ladies who give colour to such opinions by their idle, aimless course of life, their utter inappreciation of anything beyond their own little daily round, and the gossip of the dozen or so of families who for them make up what they call society and the interests of existence ; and by their conduct in the matter of marriage. Truly the great factor in the lowering of women is woman herself. But what does it matter ? In due course they have their families, and the world goes on !

Now, Dorothy did believe in all these things, and she knew what an important part they play in human affairs, and how they dominate over, and direct, finer minds. So did she believe in the existence of the planets, and in the blooming of roses in

walled gardens ; but she could not get near to know the beauties of the stars, or to see the opening rosebuds, so she had to satisfy herself with the light that poured from the one, and the scent that came from the other. When one is star-stricken, or mad in the matter of roses, that is better than nothing.

And so, taking Ernest by the hand, she led him through the crowded streets with tender care, and on to the quiet Hoe. And as they passed, the people turned to look at the handsome young fellow who was blind, and some thought that they would not mind a little blindness if it led to being personally conducted by so sweet a girl.

Soon they reached the gardens.

‘ Now tell me about yourself, Ernest. What have you been doing all these long years, besides growing bigger, and handsomer, and getting that hard look about the mouth ? ’

'A great many things, Doll. Shooting, fighting, playing the fool.'

'Pshaw! I know all that, or at least I can guess it. What have you been doing in your mind, you know?'

'Why, thinking of you, of course, Doll.'

'Ernest, if you talk to me like that, I will go away, and leave you to find your own way home. I know well of whom you have been thinking every day and every night. It was not of me. Now, confess it.'

'Don't let's talk of *her*, Doll. If you talk of the devil, you know, you sometimes raise him; not that he requires much raising in this instance,' he laughed bitterly.

'I was so sorry for you, Ernest, dear, and I did my best; indeed I did. But I could do nothing with her. She must have been off her head, or the man and Florence had some power over her; or perhaps she never really cared for you; there are some

women, you know, who seem very sweet, but cannot truly care for anybody except themselves. At any rate she married, and has a family of children, for I have seen their births in the paper.

‘Oh, Ernest, when I think of all you must have suffered out there about that woman, I cease to be sorry for her, and begin to hate her. I am afraid you have been very unhappy, Ernest, all these years.’

‘Ah, yes, I have been unhappy sometimes—sometimes I have consoled myself. There, what is the use of telling lies?—I have always been unhappy, and never so much so as when I have been in process of consolation. But you should not hate her, poor girl; perhaps she has her bad times too; only, fortunately, you women cannot feel, at least not much—not like us, I mean.’

‘I don’t know about that,’ put in Dorothy.

‘Well, I will qualify my remark—most

women. And, besides, it is not quite her fault ; people cannot help themselves much in this world. She was appointed to be my evil destiny, that is all, and she must fulfil her mission. All my life she will probably bring me trouble, till at last the fate works itself out. But, Dolly, my dear, there must be an end to these things, and Nature, always fertile in analogies, teaches us that the end of sorrow will be happiness. It is from the darkness of night that day is born, and ice and snow are followed by the flowers. Nothing is lost in the world, as old Alston used to say, and it is impossible to suppose that all the grief and suffering are alone wasted ; that they are the only dull seed that will not, when their day comes, bloom into a beautiful life. They may seem to be intangible things now ; but, after all, the difference between tangible and intangible is only a difference of matter.

We know that intangible things are real enough, and perhaps in a future state we shall find that they are the true immortal parts. I think so myself.'

'I think so too.'

'Well then, Doll, you see, if once one gets the mastery of that idea, it makes the navigation easier. Once admit that everything works to an end, and that end a good and enduring one, and you will cease to call out under your present sorrows. But it is hard for the little boy to learn to like being whipped, and we are all children, Doll, to the end of our days.

'Yes.'

'And you see, Doll, for some reason I have been picked out to catch it pretty warm. It does seem rather hard that a woman like that should be allowed to turn all the wine of a man's life into vinegar; but so it often is. Now, if she had died, that would have

been bad enough ; but I could have borne it, and bided my time to join her. Or if she had ceased to love me, and learnt to love the other man, I think I could have borne that, because my pride would have come to my rescue, and because I know that the law of her affections is the only law that the heart of woman really acknowledges, however many others she may be forced to conform to ; and that a woman of refined nature who has ceased to love you, and is yet forced to live with you, is in consequence a thing worthless to you, and dis- honoured in her own eyes. Besides, I ask no favour in such matters. I have no sympathy, as a general rule, with people who raise a howl because they have lost the affection of their wives or sweethearts, for they should have been able to keep them. If any man could have cut me out, he was welcome to do so, for he would have

proved himself the better man, and as for the lady, I would not have her without her heart. But I gather that was not quite the case with Eva.'

'Oh, no indeed; at least she said that she was wretched.'

'Exactly as I thought. Well, now, you will understand that it *is* rather hard. You see I did love her dearly, and it is painful to think of this woman, whose love I won, and who by that divine right and by the law of nature should have been my wife, as forced into being the wife of another man, however charming he may be; and I hope for her sake that he is charming. In fact it fills me with a sensation I cannot describe.'

'Poor Ernest!'

'Oh no, don't pity me. Everybody has their troubles—this is mine.'

'Oh, Ernest, but you have been unfortunate, and now your sight has gone; but

perhaps Critchett or Couper will be able to do something for that.'

'All the Critchetts and Coupers in the world will never do anything for it, my dear. But you must remember, that where I only lost my sight, many others lost their lives, and it is supposed to be better to lose your sight than your life. Besides, blindness has its advantages ; it gives you so much more time to think, and it humbles you so. You can have no idea what it is like, Doll. Intense everlasting blackness hedging you in like a wall, one long, long night, even when the sunlight is beating on your face ; and out of the night voices and the touchings of hands, like the voices and the touchings of departed spirits. Your physical body is as helpless and as much at the mercy of the world as your spiritual body is in the hands of the Almighty. And things grow dim to you too : you begin to wonder what familiar

faces and sights are like, as you wonder about the exact appearance of those who died many years ago, or of places you have not seen for years. All of which, my dear Doll, is very favourable to thought. When next you lie awake for five or six hours in the night, try to reckon all the things which occupy your brain, then imagine such wakefulness and its accompanying thoughts extended over the period of your natural life, and you will get some idea of the depth and breadth and height of total blindness.'

His words struck her, and she did not know what to answer, so she only pressed his hand in token of her mute sympathy.

He understood her meaning; the faculties of the blind are very quick.

'Do you know, Doll,' he said, 'coming back to you and to your gentle kindness, is like coming into the peace and quiet of a sheltered harbour after bearing the full

brunt of the storm.' Just then a cloud which had obscured the sun passed away, and its full light struck upon his face. 'There,' he went on, 'it is like that. It is like emerging into the sweet sunshine after riding for miles through the rain and mist.

- You bring peace with you, my dear. I have not felt such peace for years as I feel holding your hand to-day.'

'I am very glad, dear Ernest,' she answered; and they walked on in silence. At that moment, a little girl who was trundling a hoop down the gravel-path, stopped her hoop to look at the pair. She was very pretty, with large dark eyes, but Dorothy noticed that she had a curious mark upon her forehead. Presently Dorothy saw her run back towards an extremely tall and graceful woman who was sauntering along, followed at some distance by a nurse with a baby in her arms, and turning

occasionally to look at the beds of spring flowers, hyacinths and tulips, which bordered the path.

‘Oh, mother,’ she heard her call out in the clear voice of childhood, ‘there is such a nice blind man. He isn’t old and ugly, and he hasn’t a dog, and he doesn’t ask for pennies. Why is he blind if he hasn’t a dog, and doesn’t ask for pennies?’

Blindness, according to this little lady’s ideas, evidently sprang from the presence of a cur and an unsatisfied hunger for copper coin. Sometimes it does.

The tall, graceful lady looked up carelessly, saying, ‘Hush, dear!’ She was quite close to them now, for they were walking towards each other, and Dorothy gave a great gasp, for before her stood *Eva Plowden!* There was no doubt about it. She was paler and haughtier-looking than of yore; but it was she. No one who had

once seen her could mistake that queenly beauty. Certainly Dorothy could not mistake it.

‘What is the matter, Doll?’ said Ernest carelessly. He was thinking of other things.

‘Nothing; I hurt myself.’ They were quite close now.

And Eva, too, looked at them, and she, too, saw the face she had never thought to see again. With all her eyes, and with her lips parted as though to cry out, she gazed at the sight before her—slowly, slowly, taking in all it meant.

They were nearly level now.

Then there leapt up into her eyes and face—the eyes and face which a second before had been so calm and statue-like—a wild light of love, an intensity of passionate and jealous desire, such as is not often to be seen on the faces of women.

‘Ernest there, and Ernest blind, and

being led by the hand by Dorothy, and looking happy with her! How dared she touch her love! How dared he look happy with her!' Those were the thoughts which flashed through her troubled mind.

She made a step towards them as though to address him, and the blind eyes fell upon her lovely face and wandered over it. It made her mad. His eyes were on her face, and yet he could not see her. Oh God!

Dorothy saw the motion, and moved by an overmastering instinct threw herself between them in an attitude of protection not unmixed with defiance. And so, for a second, their eyes flashing and their bosoms heaving with emotion, the two women stood face to face, and the blind pathetic eyes wandered uneasily over both, feeling a presence they were unable to define.

It was a tragic, almost a dreadful, scene. The passions it revealed were too intense

for words, as no brush can justly paint a landscape made vivid by the unnatural fierceness of the lightning.

‘ Well, Doll, why do you stop ? ’ he said impatiently.

His voice broke the spell. Eva withdrew her arm, which was half-outstretched, and touched her lips with her finger as though to enjoin silence. Then a deep misery spread itself over her flushed face ; her head sank low, and she passed thence with rapid steps. Presently the nurse with the baby followed her, and Dorothy noticed vaguely that the child had also a mark upon its forehead. The whole thing had not taken forty seconds.

‘ Doll,’ said Ernest, with a wild voice, and commencing to tremble, ‘ who was that passed us ? ’

‘ A lady,’ was the answer.

‘ A lady ; yes, I know that—what lady ? ’

‘I don’t know—a lady with children.’ It was a fib, but she could not tell him then; an instinct warned her not to do so.

‘Oh ! It is strange, Doll, strange ; but do you know, I felt just now as though Eva were very near me ? Come, let us go home ! ’

Just then the cloud got over the sun again, and they walked home in the shadow. Apparently, too, all their talkativeness had gone the way of the sun. They had nothing to say.

CHAPTER IX.

INTROSPECTIVE.

EVVA PLOWDEN could scarcely be said to be a happy woman. A refined woman who has deliberately married one man when she loves another is not as a rule happy afterwards, unless indeed she is blessed, or cursed, with a singularly callous nature. But there are degrees and degrees of unhappiness. Such a fate as Eva's would have killed Dorothy, and would have driven Florence, bad as she might otherwise be, to suicide or madness. But with Eva herself it was not so ; she was not sufficiently finely strung to suffer thus. Hers was not a very happy life, and that was all about it. She

had been most miserable ; but when the first burst of her misery had passed, like the raving storm that sometimes ushers in a wet December day, she had more or less reconciled herself—like a sensible woman—to her position. The day was always rather wet, it is true, but still the sun peeped out now and again, and if life was not exactly a joyous thing, it was at least endurable.

And yet with it all she loved Ernest in her heart as much as ever ; his memory was inexpressibly dear to her, and her regrets were sometimes very bitter. On the whole, however, she had got over it wonderfully, better than anybody, who could have witnessed her agony some years before, when Florence told her the whole truth immediately after the wedding, would have thought possible. The Sabine women, we are told, offered every reasonable resistance to their rape by the Romans, but before long gave

the strongest proofs of reconciliation to their lot. There was something of the Sabine woman about Eva. Indeed the contrast between her state of mind as regarded Ernest, and Ernest's state of mind as regarded her, would make a curious study. They each loved the other, and yet how different had the results of that love been on the two natures. To Eva it had been and was a sorrow, sometimes a very real one; to Ernest, the destruction of all that made life worth living. The contrast indeed was almost pitiable, it was so striking; so wide a gulf was fixed between the two. The passion of the one was a wretched thing compared to the other. But both were real, it was merely a difference of degree. If Eva's affection was weak when measured by Ernest's, it was because the soil in which it grew was poorer. She gave all she had to give.

As for Mr. Plowden, he could not but feel that on the whole his matrimonial speculation had answered very well. He was honestly fond of his wife, and, as he had a right to be, very proud of her. At times she was cold and capricious, and at times she was sarcastic ; but take it altogether, she made him a good and serviceable wife, and lifted him up many pegs in the social scale. People saw that though Plowden was not a gentleman, he had managed to marry a lady, and a very lovely lady too ; and he was tolerated, indeed to a certain extent courted, for the sake of his wife. It was principally to attain this end that he had married her, so he had every reason to be satisfied with his bargain, and he was, besides, proud to be the legal owner of so handsome a creature.

Eva often thought of her old lover, though, except in the vaguest way, she had

heard nothing of him for years. Indeed she was, as it happened, thinking of him tenderly enough that very morning, when her little girl had called her attention to the 'nice blind man.' And when she at last, in a way which seemed to her little short of miraculous, set eyes again upon his face, all her smouldering passion broke into flame, and she felt that she still loved him with all her strength, such as it was.

At that moment indeed she realized how great, how bitter, how complete was the mistake she had made, and what a beautiful thing life might have been for her if things had gone differently. But remembering how things *were*, she bowed her head and passed on, for the time completely crushed.

Presently, however, two points became clear in the confusion of her mind, taking shape and form as distinct and indisputable

mental facts, and these were—first, that she was wildly jealous of Dorothy ; second, that it was her fixed determination to see Ernest. She regretted now that she had been too overcome to go up and speak to him, for see him she must and would, indeed her sick longing to look upon his face and hear his voice filled her with alarm.

Eva reached her home, after the meeting on the Hoe, just before luncheon time. Her husband was now acting as *locum tenens* for the rector of one of the Plymouth parishes. They had moved thus from place to place for years, waiting for the Kestervick living to fall vacant, and Eva liked the roving life well enough—it diverted her thoughts.

Presently she heard her husband enter, bringing somebody else with him, and summoned up the sweet smile for which she was remarkable to greet him.

In another instant he was in the room, followed by a fresh-faced subaltern, whose appearance reminded her of the pictures of cherubs. Mr. Plowden had changed but little since we saw him last, with the exception that his hair was now streaked with grey, and the whole face rather stouter. Otherwise the cold grey eyes were as cold as ever, and the countenance of Plowden was what the countenance of Plowden had always been—powerful, intelligent, and coarse-looking.

‘Let me introduce my friend Lieutenant Jasper to you, my dear,’ he said in his full strong voice, which was yet unpleasant to the ear. ‘We met at Captain Johnstone’s, and as it is a long way to go to the barracks for lunch, I asked him to come and take pot-luck with us.’

The cherubic Jasper had screwed an eye-glass into his round eye, and through it

was contemplating Eva with astonished ecstasy ; but, like most very beautiful women, she was used to that sort of thing, and it only amused her faintly. Mr. Plowden too was used to it, and took it as personal compliment.

‘I am delighted,’ she murmured, and held out her hand.

The cherub, suddenly awaking to the fact, dropped his eyeglass, and plunging at it, seized it as a pike does a little fish, and shook it with enthusiasm.

Eva smiled again.

‘Shall we go to lunch ?’ she said sweetly ; and they went to lunch, she sailing down in front of them with the grace of a swan.

At lunch itself the conversation flagged rather, that is, Mr. Plowden talked with all the facility of an extemporary preacher ; the cherub gazed at this pale, dark-eyed angel ; and Eva, fully occupied with her

own thoughts, contributed a great many appreciative smiles, and a few random remarks. Just as they were, to her intense relief, nearing the conclusion of the meal, a messenger arrived to summon Mr. Plowden to christen a dying baby. He got up at once, for he was punctilious in the performance of his duties, and making excuses to his guest, departed on his errand, thus forcing Eva to carry on the conversation.

‘Have you been in Plymouth long, Mr. Jasper?’ she asked.

The eyeglass dropped spasmodically.

‘Plymouth! oh dear, no, I only landed this morning.’

‘Landed! Indeed! where from? I did not know that any boat was in except the “Conway Castle.”’

‘Well, I came by her, from the Zulu War, you know. I was invalided home for fever.’

The cherub suddenly became intensely interesting to Eva, for it had struck her that Ernest must have come from there.

‘Indeed! I hope you had a pleasant passage. It depends so much on your fellow-passengers, does it not?’

‘Oh, yes, we had a very nice lot of men on board, wounded officers mostly. There were a couple of very decent civilians too, a giant of a fellow called Jones, and a blind baronet, Sir Ernest Kershaw.’

Eva’s bosom heaved.

‘I once knew a Mr. Ernest Kershaw, I wonder if it is the same. He was tall, and had dark eyes.’

‘That’s the man; he only got his title a month or two ago. A melancholy sort of chap, I thought; but then he can’t see now. That Jones is a wonderful fellow though—could pull two heavy men up at once, as easily as you would lift a puppy

dog. Saw him do it myself. I knew them both out there.'

'Oh. Where did you meet them ?'

'Well, it was rather curious. I suppose you heard of the great disaster at that place with an awful name. Well, I was at a beastly hole called Help Makaar, when a fellow came riding like anything from Rorke's Drift, telling us what had happened, and that the Zulus were coming. So we all set to and worked like mad, and just as we had got the place a little fit for them, somebody shouted that he saw them coming. That was just as it was getting dark. I ran to the wall to look, and saw, not the Zulus, but a great big fellow carrying a dead fellow in his arms, followed by a Kafir leading three horses. At least I thought the fellow was dead, but he wasn't, he had been struck by lightning. We let him in, and such a sight as they were

you never saw, all soaked with blood from top to toe.'

'Ah! And how did they come like that?'

'They were the only survivors of a volunteer corps called Alston's Horse. They killed all the Zulus that were attacking them, when the Zulus had killed everybody except them. Then they came away, and the blind fellow, that is, Sir Ernest, got struck in a storm—fellows often do out there.'

Eva put further questions, and listened with breathless interest to the story of Ernest's and Jeremy's wonderful escape, so far as the details were known to Mr. Jasper, quite regardless of the pitiless fire that young gentleman was keeping on herself through his eyeglass. At last, reluctantly enough, he rose to go.

'I must be off now, Mrs. Plowden; I

want to go and call on Sir Ernest at the hotel. He lent me a Derringer pistol to practise at a bottle with, and I forgot to give it back.'

Eva turned the full battery of her beautiful eyes upon him. She saw that the young gentleman was struck, and determined to make use of him. Women are unscrupulous when they have an end in view.

'I am so sorry you must go, but I hope you will come and see me again, and tell me some more about the war and the battles.'

'You are very kind,' he stammered; 'I shall be delighted.'

He did not think it necessary to add that he had not had the luck to see a shot fired himself. Why should he?

'By the way, if you are going to see Sir Ernest, do you think you could give

him a private message from me? I have a reason for not wishing it to be overheard.'

'Oh, yes, I dare say I can. Nothing would give me greater pleasure.'

'You are very good.' Another glance. 'Will you tell him that I wish he would take a fly and come to see me. I shall be in all this afternoon.'

A pang of jealousy shot through the cherubic bosom, but he comforted himself with the reflection that a fine woman like that could not care for a 'blind fellow.'

'Oh, certainly, I will try.'

'Thank you,' and she extended her hand.

He took it, and, intoxicated by those superb eyes, ventured to press it tenderly. A mild wonder took possession of Eva's mind, that anybody so very young could have developed such an astonishing amount

of impudence, but she did not resent the pressure. What did she care about having her hand squeezed when it was a question of seeing Ernest ! Poor deluded cherub !

CHAPTER X.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

WITHIN an hour of the departure of Lieutenant Jasper, Eva heard a fly draw up at the door. Then came an interval and the sound of two people walking up the steps, one of whom stumbled a good deal ; then a ring.

‘ Is Mrs. Plowden at home ? ’ said a clear voice, the well-remembered tones of which sent the blood to her head and then back to her heart with a rush.

‘ Yes, sir.’

‘ Oh. Wait here, flyman. Now, my good girl, I must ask you to give me your hand, for I am not in a condition to find my way about strange places.’

Another pause and the drawing-room door opened, and the maid came in leading Ernest, who wore a curious drawn look upon his face.

‘How do you do?’ she said in a low voice, coming and taking him by the hand. ‘That will do, Jane.’

He did not speak till the door closed, he only looked at her with those searching blind eyes.

Thus they met again after many years.

She led him to a sofa and he sat down.

‘Do not leave go of my hand,’ he said quickly, ‘I have not yet got used to talking to people in the dark.’

She sat down on the sofa beside him, feeling frightened and yet happy. For awhile they remained silent, apparently they could find nothing to say, and after all silence seemed most fitting. She had never thought to sit hand in hand with him again. She

looked at him ; there was no need for her to keep a guard over her loving glances, for he was blind. At length she broke the silence.

‘ Were you surprised to get my message ? ’ she asked gently.

‘ Yes ; it was like getting a message from the dead. I never expected to see you again ; I thought that you had quite passed out of my life.’

‘ So you had forgotten me ? ’

‘ Why do you say such a thing to me ? You must know, Eva, that it is impossible for me to forget you ; I almost wish that it were possible. I meant that you had passed out of my outward life, for out of my mind you can never pass.’

Eva hung her head and was silent, and yet his words sent a thrill of happiness through her. So she had not quite lost him after it all.

‘ Listen, Eva,’ Ernest went on, gathering

himself together, and speaking sternly enough now, and with a strange suppressed energy that frightened her. ‘How you came to do what you have done you best know.’

‘It is done ; do not let us speak of it. I was not altogether to blame,’ she broke in.

‘I was not going to speak of it. But I was going to say this, now while I have the chance, because time is short, and I think it right that you should know the truth. I was going to tell you first that for what you have done I freely forgive you.’

‘Oh, Ernest !’

‘It is,’ he went on, not heeding her, ‘a question that you can settle with your conscience and your God. But I wish to tell you what it is that you have done. You have wrecked my life, and made it an unhappy thing ; you have taken that from me which I can never have to give again ; you have embittered my mind, and driven me to

sins of which I should not otherwise have dreamt. I loved you, and you gave me proofs which I could not doubt that I had won your love. You let me love you, and then when the hour of trial came you deserted and morally destroyed me, and the great and holy affection that should have been the blessing of my life has become its curse.'

Eva covered her face with her hands and sat silent.

'You do not answer me, Eva,' he said presently, with a little laugh. 'Perhaps you find what I have to say difficult to answer, or perhaps you think I am taking a liberty.'

'You are very hard,' she said in a low voice.

'Had you not better wait till I have done before you call me hard? If I wished to be hard, I should tell you that I no longer cared for you, that my prevailing

feeling towards you was one of contempt. It would perhaps mortify you to think that I had shaken off such heavy chains. But it is not the truth, Eva. I love you now, passionately as ever, as I always have loved you, as I always shall love you. I hope for nothing, I ask for nothing ; in this business it has always been my part to give, not to receive. I despise myself for it, but so it is.'

She laid her hand upon his shoulder.
'Spare me, Ernest,' she whispered.

'I have very little more to say, only this. I believe all this I have given you has not been given uselessly. I believe that the love of the flesh will die with the flesh. But my love for you has been something more and higher than that, or how has it lived without hope, and in spite of its dishonour, through so many years ? It is of the spirit, and I believe that its life will be

like that of the spirit, unending, and that when this hateful life is done with I shall in some strange way reap its fruits with you.'

‘ Why do you believe that, Ernest ? ’

‘ Why do I believe it ? I cannot tell you. Perhaps it is nothing but the mocking phantasy of a mind broken down with brooding on its grief. In trouble we grow towards the light like a plant in the dark, you know. As a crushed flower smells sweet, so all that is most beautiful and aspiring in human nature is called into life when God lays His heavy hand upon us. Heaven is sorrow’s sole ambition. No, Eva, I do not know why I believe it, certainly you have given me no grounds for faith, but I do believe it, and it comforts me. By the way, how did you know that I was here ? ’

‘ I passed you on the Hoe this morning walking with Dorothy.

Ernest started. 'I felt you pass,' he said, 'and asked Dorothy who it was. She said she did not know.'

'She knew, but I made a sign to her not to say.'

'Oh.'

'Ernest, will you promise me something?' asked Eva wildly.

'What is it?'

'Nothing. I have changed my mind—nothing at all.'

The promise that she was about to ask, was that he would not marry Dorothy, but her better nature rose in rebellion against it. Then they talked a while of Ernest's life abroad.

'Well,' said Ernest, rising after a pause, 'good-bye, Eva.'

'It is a very cruel word,' she murmured.

'Yes, it is cruel, but not more cruel than the rest.'

‘It has been a happiness to see you, Ernest.’

He shrugged his shoulders as he answered, ‘Has it? For myself I am not sure if it has been a happiness or a misery. I must have a year or two of quiet and darkness to think it over before I make up my mind. Will you kindly ring the bell for the servant to take me away?’

Half unconsciously she obeyed him, and then she came and took his hand and looked with all her eyes and all her soul into his face. It was fortunate that he could not see her.

‘Oh, Ernest, you are blind,’ she cried, scarcely knowing what she said.

He laughed—a hard little laugh. ‘Yes, Eva, *I am as blind now as you have been always.*’

‘Ernest! Ernest! how can I live without seeing you? *I love you!*’ and she fell into his arms.

He kissed her, and then somehow, he never knew how, found the strength to put her from him. Perhaps it was because he heard the servant coming.

Next moment the servant came and led him away.

As soon as he was gone Eva flung herself on to the sofa, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

When Dorothy saw a fresh-faced young officer, who had come up to see Ernest, mysteriously lead him aside, and whisper something in his ear which caused him to turn first red and then white, she, being a shrewd observer, thought it curious. But when Ernest asked her to ring the bell, and then ordered a fly to be brought round at once, the idea of Eva at once flashed into her mind. She and no other must be at the bottom of this mystery. Presently the

fly was announced, and Ernest went off without a word, leaving her to the tender mercies of the cherub, who was contemplating her with his round eye as he had contemplated Eva, and finding her also charming. It must be remembered that he had but just returned from South Africa, and was prepared, *faute de mieux*, to fall in love with an apple-woman. How much more then would he succumb to the charms of the stately Eva and the extremely fascinating Dorothy? It was some time before the latter could get rid of him and his eyeglass. On an ordinary occasion she would have been glad enough to entertain him, for Dorothy liked a little male society, and the Cherub, though he did look so painfully young, was not half a bad fellow, and after all his whole soul was in his eyeglass, and his staring was meant to be complimentary. But just now she had

a purpose in her little head, and was heartily glad when he departed to reflect over the rival attractions of the two charmers.

It was very evident to Dorothy, who was always strictly practical, that to keep Eva and Ernest in the same town was to hold dry tow to a lighted match over a barrel of gunpowder. She only hoped that he might come back now without having put his foot into it.

‘Oh, what fools men are !’ she said to herself, with a stamp ; ‘a pretty face and a pair of bright eyes, and they count the world well lost for them. Bah ! if it had been a plain woman who played Ernest that trick, would he be found dangling about after her now ? Not he. But with her, she has only to say a soft word or two, and he will be at her feet, I’ll be bound. I am ashamed of them both.’

Meanwhile she was putting on her bonnet,

which was a very favourite time with her for meditation, having already made up her mind as to her course of action. Ernest had authorized her to make arrangements for an interview with an oculist. She proceeded to make those arrangements by telegram, wiring to a celebrated surgeon to know if he could make an appointment for the following afternoon. Then she took a walk by herself to think things over. In an hour she returned, to find Ernest in the sitting-room looking extremely shaken and depressed.

‘You have been to see Eva,’ she said.

‘Yes,’ he answered.

Just then there was a knock at the door, and the servant brought in a telegram. It was from the oculist. He would be glad to see Sir Ernest Kershaw at four o’clock on the following afternoon.

‘I have made an appointment for you

with an eye doctor, Ernest, at four o'clock to-morrow.'

'To-morrow!' he said.

'Yes. The sooner you get your eyes looked to the better.'

He sighed. 'What is the good? However, I will go.'

And so next morning they all took the express, and at the appointed time Ernest found himself in the skilful hands of the oculist. But though an oculist can mend the sight he cannot make it.

'I can do nothing for you, Sir Ernest,' he said, after an exhaustive examination. 'Your eyes will remain as they are, but you must always be blind.'

Ernest took the news with composure. 'I thought as much,' he said; but Dorothy put her handkerchief to her face and wept secretly.

Next morning he went with Jeremy to see

Messrs. Paisley and Paisley, and told them to try and let Archdale Hall, and to lock up the numerous and valuable heirlooms, as unfortunately he was unable to see them. Then they went on home to Dum's Ness, and that night Ernest lay awake in the room where he had slept for so many years in the boyhood which now seemed so dim and remote, and listened to the stormy wind raving round the house, and thought with an aching heart of Eva, but was thankful that he had bid her farewell, and wondered if he could find the strength to keep away from her.

And Eva, his lost love, she too lay by the sea and listened to the wind, and thought on him. There she lay in her beauty, seeking the sleep that would not settle round her. She could not sleep; sweet sleep does not come readily to such as her. For her and those like her are

vain regrets and empty love and longing,
and the wreath of thorns that crowns the
brow where sorrow sits enthroned.

Yet, Eva, lift up that fevered head,
and turn those streaming eyes to heaven.
See, through the casement, high above the
tumult of the storm, there gleams a star.
For you too there shines a star called Hope,
but it is set in no earthly sky. Have
patience, wayward heart, there is but a
space of trouble. As you suffer, so have
millions suffered, and behold ! they are at
peace ; so shall millions suffer,

‘While thou that once didst make the place thou
stood’st in lovely, shalt lie still,
Thy form departed, and thy face remembered not in
good or ill.’

For of this we may be sure,—if suffering
be not the widest gate of heaven,
then heaven has no gates. Yes, unhappy
woman, stretch out those perfect arms in
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supplication to the God of sorrows for strength to bear your load, for here it shall not be lightened. The burdens which Providence straps on our backs, Providence will sometimes lessen, but those which our own folly fastens remain till death deliver us.

So, Eva, dry your tears, for they can avail you nought, and go get you to your daily task,—go tend your children and smile that sweet sad smile on all alike, and *wait*.

CHAPTER XI.

HOME AGAIN.

IT was very peaceful, that life at Kesterville, after all the fierce racket and excitement of the past years. Indeed, as day succeeded day, and brought nothing to disturb his darkness but the sound of Dorothy's gentle voice, and the scent of the flowers on the marshes when the wind blew towards the ocean, and the sharp strong odour of the sea when it set upon the land, Ernest could almost fancy that the past was nothing but a dream more or less ugly, and that this was a dream more or less pleasant, from which he should

presently wake up and find himself a boy again.

English villages change but little. Now and again a person dies, and pretty frequently some one is born ; but on the whole the tide of time creeps on very imperceptibly, and though in the course of nature the entire population is changed every sixty years or so, nobody seems to realize that it is changing. There is so little in such places to mark the change by. The same church tower makes a landmark to the eye as it did centuries ago to the eyes of our ancestors, and the same clouds sweep across the same blue space above it. There are the same old houses, the same streams, and above all, the same roads and lanes. If you could put one of our Saxon forefathers down in the neighbourhood of most of our country towns, he would have little difficulty in finding his way

about. It is the men who change, not the places.

Still there were some few changes at Kesterwick. Here and there the sea had taken another bite out of the cliff, notably on the north side of Dum's Ness, out of which a large slice had gone, thus bringing the water considerably nearer to the house. Here and there a tree too had been cut down, or a cottage built, or a family changed its residence. For instance, Miss Florence Ceswick had suddenly shut up the Cottage, where she had remained, seeing nothing of her sister or her sister's husband, ever since Eva's marriage, and had gone abroad—people said to Rome, to study art. For Florence had suddenly electrified the Kesterwick neighbourhood by appearing as an artist of tragic force and gruesome imagination. A large picture by her hand had been exhibited in the

Royal Academy of the previous year, and though the colouring was somewhat crude, made a great and deserved sensation, and finally sold for a considerable sum.

It represented a promontory of land running out far into a stormy ocean. The sky above the sea was of an inky blackness, except where a fierce ray of light from a setting sun pierced it, and impinged upon the boiling waters which surged round the low cliff of the promontory. On the extreme edge of the cliff stood a tall and lovely woman. The wind caught the white robe she wore and pressed it against her, revealing the extraordinary beauty of her form, and lifting her long fair locks, tossed them in wild confusion. She was bending forward, pointing with her right hand at the water, with such a look of ghastly agony upon her beautiful face and in the great grey eyes, that people of impression-

able temperament were wont to declare that it haunted their sleep for weeks. Down below her, just where the fierce ray lit up the heaving waters, gleamed a naked corpse. It was that of a young man, and was slowly sinking into the unfathomable darkness of the depths, turning round and round as it sank. The eyes and mouth were wide open, and the stare of the former appeared to be fixed upon those of the woman on the cliff. Lastly, over the corpse, in the storm wreaths above their heads, there hovered on steady wings a dim female figure, with its arm thrown across the face as though to hide it. This picture was called in the catalogue 'The Lost Lover,' but speculation was rife as to what it meant.

Dorothy heard of it, and went to London to see it. The first thing that struck her about the work was the extraordinary

contrast it presented to the commonplace canvases of reapers, little girls frisking with baa-lambs, and nude young women musing profoundly on the edge of pools, as though they were trying to solve the great question —to wash or not to wash—by which it was surrounded. But presently the weird horror of the picture laid hold upon her, and seemed to fascinate her, as it had so many others. Then she became aware that the faces were familiar to her, and suddenly it broke upon her mind that the sinking corpse was Ernest, and the agonized woman Eva. She examined the faces more attentively. There was no doubt about it. Florence had with consummate art changed the colouring of the hair and features, and even to a great extent altered the features themselves, but she had perfectly preserved the likeness, both upon the dead face of the murdered man, and in the horror-inspired

eyes of his lover. The picture made her sick with fear, she could not tell why, and she hurried from Burlington House full of dread of the terrible mind that had conceived it.

There had been no intercourse between the two women since Eva's marriage. Florence lived quite alone at the Cottage, and never went out anywhere, and if they met by any chance they passed with a bow. But for all that it was a relief to Dorothy to hear that she was not for some long time to see that stern face with its piercing brown eyes.

In Dum's Ness itself there appeared to be no change at all. Except that Mr. Cardus had built a new orchid house at the back, for as he grew older his mania for orchids increased rather than diminished, the place was exactly the same. Even the arrangement of the sitting-room was

unchanged, and on its familiar bracket rested the case which Jeremy had made containing the witch's head.

The people in the house had to all appearance changed as little as the house itself. Jeremy confided to Ernest that Doll had grown rather 'tubby,' which was his elegant way of indicating that she had developed a very pretty little figure, and that Grice (the old housekeeper) was as skinny as a flayed weasel, and had eyes like the point of a knife. Ernest maliciously repeated these sayings to the two ladies concerned, with the result that they were both furious. Then he retreated and left them to settle it with Jeremy.

Old Atterleigh too was almost exactly the same, except that of late years his intellect seemed to have brightened a little. It was, however, difficult to make him understand that Ernest was blind, because

the latter's eyes looked all right. He retained some recollection of him, and brought him his notched stick to show him that according to his, 'hard-riding Atterleigh's,' calculation, his time of service with the devil, otherwise Mr. Cardus, would expire in a few months. Dorothy read what the old man wrote upon his slate, and repeated it to Ernest, for he being practically dumb, and Ernest being blind, that was the only way in which they could communicate.

'And what will you do then?' asked Ernest; 'you will be wretched without any writs to fill up. Who will look after the lost souls I should like to know?'

The old man at once wrote vigorously on his slate:

'I shall go out hunting on the big black horse you brought with you; he will carry my weight.'

'I should advise you not to try,' said

Ernest, laughing ; 'he does not like strange riders.' But the old man at the mere thought of hunting was striding up and down the room, clanking his spurs and waving his hunting-crop with his uninjured arm.

'Is your grandfather as much afraid of my uncle as ever, Doll ?'

'Oh, yes, I think so ; and do you know, Ernest, I don't quite like the way he looks at him sometimes.'

Ernest laughed. 'I should think that the old boy is harmless enough,' he said.

'I hope so,' said Dorothy.

When first they got back to Dum's Ness, Jeremy was at a great loss to know what to do with himself, and was haunted by the idea that Mr. Cardus would want him to resume that stool in his office which years before he had quitted to go in search of Ernest. A week or so after his arrival,

however, his fears were very pleasantly set at rest. After breakfast Mr. Cardus sent for him to come into his office.

‘Well, Jeremy,’ he said, letting his soft black eyes wander round that young gentleman’s gigantic form, for it was by now painfully large, not so much in height, for he was not six foot three, as in its great width, which made big men look like children beside him, and even dwarfed his old grandfather’s enormous frame,—‘well, Jeremy, and what do you think of doing? You are too big for a lawyer, all your clients would be afraid of you.’

‘I don’t know about being too big,’ said Jeremy solemnly, ‘but I know that I am too great an ass. Besides, I can’t afford to spend several years in being articled at my time of life.’

‘Quite so. Then what do you propose doing?’

‘I don’t know from Adam.’

‘Well, how would you like to turn your sword to a ploughshare, and become a farmer?’

‘I think that would suit me first-rate. I have a little capital laid by. Ernest and I made a little money out there.’

‘No, I would not advise you to take a farm in that way, these are bad times. But I want a practical man to look after my land round here, salary £150. What do you say?’

‘You are very kind; but I doubt if I can boss that coach; I don’t know anything of the work.’

‘Oh, you will very soon learn, there is a capital bailiff, Stamp,—you remember him,—he will soon put you up to the ropes. So we will consider that settled.’

Thus it was that our friend Jeremy entered on a new walk in life, and one

which suited him very well. In less than a year's time he grew aggressively agricultural, and one never met him but what he had a handful of oats or a mangel-wurzel in his coat-tail pocket, which he was ready to swear were samples of the finest oats, mangel-wurzel, or whatever the particular agricultural product might be, that ever had been or were ever likely to be grown.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW IT ALL CAME ABOUT.

HOW did it all come about?

Let us try and discover. Dorothy and Ernest were together all day long. They only separated when Mazooku came to lead the former off to bed. At breakfast-time he led him back again, and handed him over to Dorothy for the day. Not that our Zulu friend liked this, he did not like it at all. It was, he considered, his business to lead his master about, and not that of the 'Rosebud,' who was, as he discovered, after all nothing but a girl connected with his master neither by birth nor marriage. And on this point there finally arose a

difference of opinion between the Rosebud and Mazooku.

The latter was leading Ernest for his morning walk, when Dorothy, perceiving it, and being very jealous of what she considered her rights, sallied out and took his hand from the great Zulu's. Then did Mazooku's long-pent indignation break forth.

'Oh, Rosebud, sweet and small Rosebud!' he commenced, addressing her in Zulu, of which needless to say she understood not one word, 'why do you come and take my Father's hand out of my hand? Is not my Father blind, and am I not his dog, his old dog, to lead him in his blindness? Why do you take his bone from a dog?'

'What is the man saying?' asked Dorothy.

'He is offended because you come to lead me; he says that he is my dog, and that

you snatch his bone from him. A pretty sort of bone indeed,' he added.

'Tell him,' said Dorothy, 'that here in this country I hold your hand. What does he want? Is he not always with you? does he not sleep across your door? What more does he want?'

Ernest translated her reply.

'Ow!' said the Zulu, with a grunt or dissatisfaction.

'He is a faithful fellow, Doll, and has stood by me for many years; you must not vex him.'

But Dorothy, after the manner of loving women, was tenacious of what she considered *her* rights.

'Tell him that he can walk in front,' she said, putting on an obstinate little look, and she could look obstinate when she liked.

Ernest translated again (for the Zulu

vowed that he could never understand Dorothy's English), and Mazooku accepted the compromise. Thus for a while the difference was patched up.

Sometimes Dorothy and Ernest would go out riding together, for, blind as he was, Ernest could not be persuaded to give up his riding. It was a pretty sight to see them; Ernest mounted on his towering black stallion 'the Devil,' which in his hands was as gentle as a lamb, but with everybody else fully justified his appellation, and Dorothy on a cream-coloured cob Mr. Cardus had given her, holding in her right hand a steel guiding-rein linked to the Devil's bit. In this way they would wander all over the country-side, and sometimes, when a good piece of turf presented itself, even venture on a sharp canter. Behind them as groom rode Mazooku, mounted on a stout pony, with his feet

stuck, Zulu fashion, well out at right angles to his animal's side.

They were a strange trio.

And so from week's end to week's end Dorothy was ever by Ernest's side, reading to him, writing for him, walking and riding with him, weaving herself into the substance of his life.

And at last there came one sunny August day, when they were sitting together in the shade of the chancel of Titheburgh Abbey. It was a favourite spot of theirs, for the grey old walls sheltered them from the glare of the sun and the breath of the winds. It was a spot, too, rich in memories of the dead past, and a pleasant place to sit.

Through the gaping window-places came the murmur of the ocean and the warmth of the harvest sunshine ; and gazing out by the chancel doorway, Dorothy could see the

long lights of the afternoon dance and sparkle on the emerald waves.

She had been reading to him, and the book lay idle on her knees as she gazed dreamily at those lights and shadows, a sweet picture of pensive womanhood. He too had relapsed into silence, and was evidently thinking deeply.

Presently she roused herself.

‘Well, Ernest,’ she said, ‘what are you thinking about? You are as dull as—as the dullest thing in the world, whatever that may be. What is the dullest thing in the world?’

‘I don’t know,’ he answered, awakening.
‘Yes, I think I do; an American novel.’

‘Yes, that is a good definition. You are as dull as an American novel.’

‘It is unkind of you to say so, Doll, my dear. I was thinking of something, Doll.’

She made a little face, which of course he could not see, and answered quickly—

‘You generally are thinking of something. You generally are thinking of—Eva, except when you are asleep, and then you are dreaming of her.’

Ernest coloured up.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘it is true, she is often more or less in my mind. It is my misfortune, Doll, not my fault. You see, I do not do things by halves.’

Dorothy bit her lip.

‘She should be vastly flattered, I am sure. Few women can boast of having inspired such affection in a man. I suppose it is because she treated you so badly. Dogs love the hand that whips them. You are a curious character, Ernest. Not many men would give so much to one who has returned so little.’

‘So much the better for them. If I had

a son, I think that I should teach him to make love to all women, and to use their affection as a means of amusement and self-advancement, but to fall in love with none.'

'That is one of your bitter remarks, for which I suppose we must thank Eva. You are always making them now. Let me tell you that there are good women in the world ; yes, and honest, faithful women, who, when they have given their heart, are true to their choice, and would not do it violence to be made Queen of England. But you men do not go the right way to find them. You think of nothing but beauty, and never take the trouble to learn the hearts of the sweet girls who grow like daisies in the grass all round you, but who do not happen to have great melting eyes or a splendid bust. You tread them under-foot, and if they were not so humble they would be crushed, as you rush off and try to

pick the rose ; and then you prick your fingers and cry out, and tell all the daisies how shamefully the rose has treated you.'

Ernest laughed, and Dorothy went on.

' Yes, it is an unjust world. Let a woman but be beautiful, and everything is at her feet, for you men are despicable creatures, and care for little except what is pleasant to the senses. On the other hand, let her be plain, or only ordinary-looking,—for the fate of most of us is just to escape being ugly,—and you pay as much regard to her as you do to the chairs you sit on. And yet, strange as it may seem to you probably, she has her feelings, and her capacities for high affection, and her imaginative power, all working vigorously behind her plain little face. Probably, too, she is better than your beauty. Nature does not give everything ; when she endows a woman with perfect loveliness she robs her either

of her heart or her brains. But you men don't see that, because you won't look, so in course of time all the fine possibilities in Miss Plainface wither up, and she becomes a disappointed old maid, whilst my Lady Beauty pursues her career of selfishness and mischief-making, till at last she withers up too, that's one comfort.'

Ernest had been listening with great amusement to Dorothy's views. He had no idea that she took such matters into her shrewd consideration.

'I heard a girl say the other day that on the whole most women preferred to become old maids,' he said.

'Then she told fibs ; they don't. It isn't natural that they should, that is, if they care for anybody. Just think, there are more than ten hundred thousand of our charming sisterhood in these islands, and more women being born every day. Ten

hundred thousand restless, unoccupied, disgusted, loveless women ! It is simply awful to think of. I wonder they don't breed a revolution. If they were all beautiful they would.'

He laughed again.

' Do you know what remedy Mazooku would apply to this state of affairs ? '

' No.'

' The instant adoption of polygamy. There are no unmarried women among the Natal Zulus, and they as a class are extremely happy.'

Dorothy shook her head.

' It wouldn't do here ; it would be too expensive.'

' I say, Doll, you spoke just now of " our charming sisterhood " ; you are rather young to consider yourself an old maid. Do you want to become one ? '

' Yes,' she said sharply.

‘Then *you* don’t care for anybody, eh?’

She blushed up furiously.

‘What business is that of yours, I should like to know?’ she answered.

‘Well, Doll, not much. But will you be angry with me if I say something?’

‘I suppose you can say what you like.’

‘Yes, but will you listen?’

‘If you speak I cannot help hearing.’

‘Well then, Doll—now don’t be angry, dear.’

‘Oh, Ernest, how you aggravate me! Can’t you get it out, and have done with it?’

‘All right, Doll, I’ll steam straight ahead this time. It is this. I have sometimes lately been vain enough to think that you cared a little about me, Doll, although I am as blind as a bat. I want to ask you if it

is true. You must tell me plain, Doll, because I cannot see your eyes to learn the truth from them.'

She turned quite pale at his words, and her eyes rested upon his blind orbs with a look of unutterable tenderness. So it had come at last.

' Why do you ask me that question, Ernest ? Whether or no I care for you, I am very sure that you do not care for me.'

' You are not quite right there, Doll, but I will tell you why I ask it ; it is not out of mere curiosity.

' You know all the history of my life, Doll, or at least most of it. You know how I loved Eva, and gave her all that a foolish youngster can give to a weak woman—gave it in such a way that I can never have it back again. Well, she deserted me ; I have lost her. The best happiness of my life has been wrecked beyond redemption,

that is a fact that must be accepted as much as the fact of my blindness. I am physically and morally crippled, and certainly in no fit state to ask a woman to marry me on the ground of my personal advantages. But if, my dear Doll, you should, as I have sometimes thought, happen to care about anything so worthless, then, you see, the affair assumes a different aspect.'

'I don't quite understand you? What do you mean?' she said, in a low voice.

'I mean that in that case I will ask you if you will take me for a husband.'

'You do not love me, Ernest, I should weary you.'

He felt for her hand, found it, and took it in his own. She made no resistance.

'Dear,' he said, 'it is this way. I can never give you that passion I have given Eva, because, thank God, the human heart

can give birth to it but once in a life ; but I can and will give you a husband's tenderest love. You are very dear to me, Doll, though it is not in the same way that Eva is dear. I have always loved you as a sister, and I think that I should make you a good husband. But before you answer me I want you to thoroughly understand about Eva. Whether I marry or not, I fear that I shall never be able to shake her out of my mind. At one time I thought that perhaps if I made love to other women I might be able to do so, on the principle that one nail drives out another. But it was a failure ; for a month or two I got the better of my thoughts, then they would get the better of me again. Besides, to tell you the truth, I am not quite sure that I wish to do so. My trouble about this woman has become a part of myself. It is, as I told you, my "evil destiny," and goes where

I go. And now, dear Doll, you will see why I asked you if you really cared for me, before I asked you to marry me. If you do not care for me, then it will clearly not be worth your while to marry me, for I am about as poor a catch as a man can well be ; if you do, well, *then* it is a matter for your consideration.'

She paused awhile and answered—

‘ Suppose that the positions were reversed, Ernest ; at least suppose this. Suppose that you had loved your Eva all your life, but she had not loved you except as a brother, having given her heart to some other man, who was, say, married to somebody else, or in some way separated from her. Well, supposing that this man died, and that one day Eva came to you and said, “ Ernest, my dear, I cannot love you as I loved him who has gone, and whom I one day hope to rejoin in heaven,

but if you wish it, and it will make you the happier, I will be your true and tender wife, and the mother of your children." What should you answer her, Ernest ?'

'Answer ! why, I suppose that I should take her at her word, and be thankful. Why, to hear her voice day by day would in itself be a happiness. Yes, I think thus, I should take her at her word.'

'And so, dear Ernest, do I take you at your word ; for as it is with you about Eva, so it is with me about you. As a child I loved you, ever since I have been a woman I have loved you more and more, even through all those cold years of absence. And when you came back, ah, then it was to me as it would be to you if you suddenly once more saw the light of day. Ernest, my beloved, you are all my life to me, and I take you at your word, my dear. I will be your wife.'

He stretched out his arms, found her, drew her to him, and kissed her on the lips.

‘Doll, I don’t deserve that you should love me so, it makes me feel ashamed that I have not more to give you in return.’

‘Ernest, you will give me all you can; I mean to make you grow very fond of me. Perhaps one day you will give me everything.’

He hesitated a little while before he spoke again.

‘Doll,’ he said, ‘you are quite sure that you do not mind about Eva?’

‘My dear Ernest, I accept Eva as a fact, and make the best of her, just as I should if I wanted to marry a man with a monomania that he was Henry VIII.’

‘Doll, you know I call her my evil destiny. The fact is, I am afraid of her; she overpowers my reason. Well, now, Doll, what I am driving at is this. Sup-

posing—not that I think she will—that she were to crop up again and take it into her head to try and make a fool of me! She *might* succeed, Doll.'

' Ernest, will you promise me something on your honour ? '

' Yes, dear.'

' Promise me that you will hide from me nothing that passes between Eva and yourself, if anything ever should pass, and that in this matter you will always consider me not in the light of a wife, but of a trusted friend.'

' Why do you ask me to promise that ? '

' Because then I shall, I hope, be able to keep you both out of trouble. You are not fit to look after yourselves, either of you.'

' I promise. And now, Doll, there is one more thing. It is somehow fixed in my mind that my fate and that woman's are intertwined. I believe that what we are

now passing through is but a single phase of interwoven existence, that we have perhaps already passed through many stages, and that many higher stages and developments await us. Of course it may be fantasy, but at any rate I believe it. The question is, do you care to link your life with that of a man who holds such a belief?’

‘ Ernest, I dare say your belief is a true one, at any rate for you who believe it, for it seems probable that as we sow so shall we reap, as we spiritually imagine so shall we spiritually inherit, since causes must in time produce effects. These beliefs are not implanted in our hearts for nothing, and surely in the wide heavens there is room for the realization of them all. But I too have my beliefs, and one of them is, that in God’s great Hereafter every loving and desiring soul will be with the soul thus

loved and desired. For him or her at any rate, the other will be there forming a part of his or her life, though perhaps it may elsewhere and with others also be pursuing its own desires and satisfying its own aspirations. So you see, Ernest, your beliefs will not interfere with mine, nor shall I be afraid of losing you in another place.

‘ And now, Ernest, my heart’s love, take my hand, and let me lead you home ; take my hand, as you have taken my heart, and never leave go of it again till at last I die.’

And so hand in hand they went home together, through the lights and shadows of the twilight.

CHAPTER XIII.

MAZOOKU'S FAREWELL.

DOROTHY and Ernest got back to Dum's Ness just in time to dress for dinner, for since Ernest and Jeremy had come back, Dorothy, whose will in that house was law, had instituted late dinner. The dinner passed over as usual, Dorothy sitting between Ernest and her grandfather, and attending to the wants of those two unfortunates, both of whom would have found it rather difficult to get through their meal without her gentle, unobtrusive help. But when dinner was over and the cloth removed, and Grice had

placed the wine upon the table and withdrawn, an unusual thing happened.

Ernest asked Dorothy to fill his glass with port, and when she had done so he said—

‘Uncle and Jeremy, I am going to ask you to drink a health.’

The old man looked up sharply. ‘What is it, Ernest, my boy?’

As for Dorothy, she blushed a rosy red, guessing what was coming, and not knowing whether to be pleased or angry.

‘It is this, uncle—it is the health of my future wife, Dorothy.’

Then came a silence of astonishment. Mr. Cardus broke it.

‘Years ago, Ernest, my dear nephew, I told you that I wished this to come to pass; but other things happened to thwart my plans, and I never expected to see it. Now in God’s good time it has

come, and I drink the health with all my heart. My children, I know that I am a strange man, and my life has been devoted to a single end, which is now drawing near its final development; but I have found time in it to learn to love you both. Dorothy, my daughter, I drink your health. May the happiness that was denied to your mother fall upon your head, her share and your share too. Ernest, you have passed through many troubles, and have been preserved almost miraculously to see this day. In her you will find a reward for everything, for she is a good woman. Perhaps I shall never live to see your happiness and the children of your happiness, I do not think I shall; but may the solemn blessing I give you now rest upon your dear heads. God bless you both, my children, and here and now I thank Him that He has brought this

good thing to pass. All peace go with you, Dorothy and Ernest.'

'Amen,' said Jeremy, in a loud voice, and with a vague idea that he was in church. Then he got up and shook Ernest's hand so hard in his fearful grip that the latter was constrained to holloa out, and lifted Dolly out of her chair like a plaything, and kissed her boisterously, knocking the orchid bloom she wore out of her hair in the process. Then they all sat down again and beamed at one another and drank port wine,—at least the men did,—and were inanely happy.

Indeed the only person to whom the news was not satisfactory was Mazooku. 'Ou !' he said, with a grunt, when Jeremy communicated it to him. 'So the Rosebud is going to become the Rose, and I shan't even be able to lead my Father to bed now. Ou !' and from that day forward

Mazooku's abstracted appearance showed that he was meditating deeply on something.

Next morning his uncle sent for Ernest into the office. Dorothy led him in.

‘Oh, here you are,’ said his uncle.

‘Yes, here we are, Reginald,’ answered Dorothy; ‘what is it? Shall I go away?’

‘No, don’t go away. What I have to say concerns you both. Come and look at the orchids, Ernest, they are beautiful. Ah!’ he went on, stammering, ‘I forgot you can’t see them. Forgive me.’

‘Never mind, uncle, I can smell them;’ and they went into the blooming-house, appropriated to the temperate kinds.

At the end of this house was a little table and some iron chairs, where Mr. Cardus would sometimes come and smoke a cigarette. Here they sat down.

‘Now, young people,’ said Mr. Cardus, wiping his bald head, ‘you are going to

get married. May I ask what you are going to get married on ?'

'By Jove,' said Ernest, 'I never thought of that. I haven't got much, except a title, a mansion with "numerous and valuable" heirlooms, and one hundred and eighty acres of park,' he added, laughing.

'No, I don't suppose you have; but, luckily for you both, I am not so badly off, and I mean to do something for you. What do you think would be the proper thing? Come, Dorothy, my little house-wife, what do you reckon you can live on —living here, I mean, for I suppose that you do not mean to run away and leave me alone in my old age, do you ?'

Dorothy wrinkled up her forehead as she used to as a child, and began to calculate upon her fingers. Presently she answered, 'Three hundred a year comfortably, quietly on two.'

‘What,’ said Mr. Cardus, ‘when the babies begin to come?’

Dorothy blushed, old gentlemen are so unpleasantly outspoken, and Ernest jumped, for the prospect of unlimited babies is alarming till one gets used to it.

‘Better make it five hundred,’ he said.

‘Oh,’ said Mr. Cardus, ‘that’s what you think, is it. Well, I tell you what I think. I am going to allow you young people two thousand a year, and pay the house-keeping bills.’

‘My dear uncle, that is far more than we want.’

‘Nonsense, Ernest, it is there and to spare, and why should you not have it, instead of its piling up in the Bank, or in investments? There are enough of them now, I can tell you. Everything that I have touched has turned to gold; I believe it has often been the case with

unfortunate men. Money ! I have more than I know what to do with, and there are idiots who think that to have lots of money is to be happy.'

He paused a while and then went on.

'I would give you more, but you are both comparatively young, and I do not wish to encourage habits of extravagance in you. The world is full of vicissitudes, and it is impossible for anybody to know how they may be pecuniarily situated in ten years' time. But I wish you, Ernest, to keep up your rank,—moderately if you like, but still to keep it up. Life is all before you now, and whatever you choose to go in for, you shall not want the money to back you. Look here, my children, I may as well tell you that when I die you will inherit nearly all I have got; I have left it to be divided equally between you, with reversion

to the survivor. I drew up that will some years back, and I do not think that it is worth while altering it now.'

'Forgive me,' said Ernest, 'but how about Jeremy?'

Mr. Cardus' face changed a little. He had never got over his dislike of Jeremy, though his sense of justice caused him to stifle it.

'I have not forgotten Jeremy,' he said, in a tone that indicated that he did not wish to pursue the conversation.

Ernest and Dorothy thanked the old man for his goodness, but he would not listen, so they went off and left him to return to his letter-writing. In the passage Dorothy peeped through the glass half of the door which opened into her grandfather's room.

There sat the old man writing, writing, his long iron-grey hair hanging all about his face. Presently he seemed to think of

something, and a smile which the contorted mouth made ghastly spread itself over the pallid countenance. Rising he went to the corner and extracted a long tally stick on which were cut notches. Sitting down again he counted the remaining notches over and over, and then took a penknife and cut one out. This done he put the stick back, and looking at the wall began to mutter, for he was not quite dumb, and to clasp and unclasp his powerful hand. Dorothy entered the room quickly.

‘Grandfather, what are you doing?’ she said sharply.

The old man started and his jaw dropped. Then the eyes grew dull and his usual apathetic look stole over his face. Taking up his slate he wrote, ‘Cutting out my notches.’

Dorothy asked him some further questions, but could get nothing more out of him.

‘I don’t at all like the way grandfather

has been going on lately,' she said to Ernest. ' He is always muttering and clenching his hand, as though he had some one by the throat. You know he thinks that he has been serving the fiend all these years, and that his time will be up shortly, whereas you know, though Reginald had no cause to love him, he has been very kind to him. If it had not been for Reginald my grandfather would have been sent to the madhouse ; but because he was connected with his loss of fortune, he thinks he is the devil. He forgets how he served Reginald ; you see even in madness the mind only remembers the injuries inflicted on itself, and forgets those it inflicted on others. I don't at all like his way.'

' I should think that he had better be shut up.'

' Oh, Reginald would never do it. Come, dear, let us go out.'

* * * * *

It was a month or so after Mr. Cardus' announcement of his pecuniary intentions, that a little wedding party stood before the altar in Kesterwick church. It was a very small party, consisting indeed only of Ernest, Dorothy, Mr. Cardus, Jeremy, and a few idlers who, seeing the church door open, had strolled in to see what was going on. Indeed the marriage had been kept a profound secret, for since he had been blind Ernest had developed a great dislike to being stared at. Nor indeed had he any liking for the system under which a woman proclaims with loud and unseemly rejoicings that she has found a man to marry her, and the clan of her relations celebrate her departure with a few outward and visible tears and much inward and spiritual joy.

But among that small crowd, unobserved by any of them, quite close up in the shadow

of one of the massive pillars, sat a veiled woman. She sat quite quiet and still, she might have been carved in stone ; but as the service went on she raised her thick veil and fixed her keen brown eyes upon the two who stood before the altar. And as she did so the lips of this shadowy lady trembled a little, and a mist of trouble rose from the unhealthy marshes of her mind and clouded her fine-cut features. Long and steadily she gazed, then dropped the veil again and said beneath her breath—

‘Was it worth while for this ? Well, I have seen him.’

Then she rose, did this shadowy, noble-looking lady, and glided from the church, bearing away with her the haunting burden of her sin.

And Ernest ? He stood there and said the responses in his clear manly voice ; but even as he did so there rose before him the

semblance of the little room in far-away Pretoria, and of the vision which he had had of this very church, and of a man standing where he himself stood now, and a lovely woman standing where stood Dorothy his wife. Well, it was gone, as all visions go, as we, who are but visions of a longer life, go too. It was gone, gone into that awful limbo of the past which is ever opening its insatiable maw and swallowing us and our joys and our sorrows,—making a meal of the atoms of to-day, that it may support itself till the atoms of to-morrow are ready for its appetite.

It was gone, and he was married, and Dorothy his wife stood there wreathed in smiles and blushes which he could not see, and Mr. Halford's voice, now grown weak and quavering, was formulating heartfelt congratulations, which were being repeated in the gigantic echo of Jeremy's deep tones, and in his uncle's quick jerky utterances.

So he took Dorothy his wife into his arms and kissed her, and she led him down the church to the old vestry, into which so many thousand newly-married couples had passed during the course of the last six centuries, and signed his name where they placed his pen upon the parchment, wondering the while if he was signing it straight, and then went out, and was helped into the carriage, and driven home.

Ernest and his wife went upon no honeymoon ; they stopped quietly there at the old house, and began to accustom themselves to their new relationship. Indeed, to the outsider at any rate, there seemed to be little difference between it and the former one, for they could not be much more together now than they had been before. Yet in Dorothy's face there was a difference. A great peace, an utter satisfaction which

had been wanting before, came down and brooded upon it, and made it beautiful. She both looked and was a happy woman.

But to the Zulu Mazooku this state of affairs did not appear to be satisfactory.

One day, it was three days after the marriage, Ernest and Dorothy were walking together outside the house, when Jeremy, coming in from a visit to a distant farm, advanced, and joining them, began to converse on agricultural matters, for he was already becoming intensely and annoyingly technical. Presently, as they talked, they became aware of the sound of naked feet running swiftly over the grass.

'That sounds like a Zulu dancing,' said Ernest quickly.

It was a Zulu, it was Mazooku, but Mazooku transformed. It had been his fancy to bring a suit of war toggery, such as he had worn when he was one of Cety-

wayo's soldiers, with him from Natal, and now he had donned it all, and stood before them a striking yet alarming figure. From his head there rose, a good two feet into the air, a single beautiful grey feather, taken from the Bell crane ; around his waist hung a kilt of white ox-tails, and beneath his right knee a small circle of white goat's hair. For the rest he was naked. In his left hand he held a milk-white fighting-shield, made of ox-hide, and in his right his great 'bangwan,' or stabbing assegai. Still as a statue he stood before them, his plume bending in the breeze, and Dorothy, looking with wondering eyes, marvelled at the broad chest scarred all over with assegai wounds, and the huge sinewy limbs. Suddenly he raised the spear and saluted in sonorous tones—

‘Koos ! Baba !’

‘Speak,’ said Ernest.

‘I speak, my Father ; I come to meet my

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Father as a man meets a man. I come with spear and shield, but not in war. With my Father I came from the land of the sun into this cold land, where the sun is as pale as the white faces it shines on. Is it not so, my Father ?'

'I hear you.'

'With my Father I came.. Did not my Father and I stand together for many a day ? Did I not slay the two Basutus down in the land of Sekukuni, chief of the Bapedi, at my Father's bidding ? Did I not once save my Father from the jaws of the wild beast that walks by night ' (the lion) ? ' Did I not stand by the side of my Father at the place of the Little Hand ' (Isandhlwana), ' when all the plain was red with blood ? Do I dream in the night, or was it so, my Father ?'

'I hear you. It was so.'

'Then when the heavens above smelt

out my Father, and smote him with their fire, did I not say, "Ah, my Father, now art thou blind, and canst fight no more, and no more play the part of a man; better that thou hadst died a man's death, oh my Father! But as thou art blind, lo, whither thou goest, thither will I go also and be my Father's dog." Did I not say this, oh my Father ?'

'Thou didst say it.'

'And so we came across the black water, my Father and I and the great Lion, like unto whom no man was ever born of woman, and came hither, and have lived for many moons the lives of women, have eaten and drunken, and have not fought or hunted, or known the pleasure of men. Is it not so, my Father ?'

'Thou speakest truly, Mazooku; it is even so.'

'Yes, we came across the black water in

the smoking ship, came to the land of wonders, which is full of houses and trees, so that a man cannot breathe in it, or throw out his arms lest they should strike a wall ; and behold there came an ancient one with a shining head wonderful to look on, and a girl rosebud, small but very sweet, and greeted my Father and the Lion, and led them away in the carriages which put the horses inside them, and put them in this place, where they may look for ever at the sadness of the sea.

‘ And then behold the Rosebud said, “ What doth this black dog here ? shall a dog lead Mazimba ” (Ernest’s Zulu name) “ by the hand ? Begone, thou black dog, and walk in front or ride behind, it is I who will hold Mazimba’s hand.”

‘ And then my Father, sinking deep in ease, and becoming a fat (well-to-do) man, said to himself, “ I will take this Rosebud

to wife." And so the Rosebud opened her petals, and closed them round my Father, and became a rose, and now she sheds her fragrance round him day by day and night by night, and the black dog stands and howls outside the door.

‘ And so, my Father, it came to pass that Mazooku, thy ox and thy dog, communed with his heart, and said, “ Here is no more any place for thee. Mazimba thy chief has no longer any need of thee, and behold in this land of women thou too shalt grow like a woman. So get up and go to thy Father and say to him, Oh my Father, years ago I put my hand between thy hands and became a loyal man to thee ; now would I withdraw it and return to the land whence we came, for here I am not wanted, and here I cannot breathe.” I have spoken, oh my Father and my chief.’

‘ Mazooku, son of Ingoluvu, umfana ga

Amazulu' (child of the Zulu race), answered Ernest, adopting the Zulu metaphor, his voice sounding wonderfully soft as the liquid tongue he spoke so well came rolling out, ' thou hast been a good man to me, and I have loved thee. But thou shalt go. Thou art right ; now is my life the life of a woman, never again shall I hear the sound of the rifle or the ringing of steel in war. And so thou goest, Mazooku. It is well. But at times thou wilt think of thy blind master, and of the wise Captain who sleeps (Alston), and of the Lion who threw the ox over his shoulder. Go, and be happy. Many be thy wives, many thy children, and countless thy cattle. The Lion shall take thee by the hand and lead thee to the sea, and shall give thee of my bounty wherewith to buy a little food when thou comest to thine own land, and a few oxen, and a piece of ground, or a waggon or two, so that

thou shalt not be hungry, nor want for cattle to give for wives. Mazooku, fare thee well.'

'One word, my Father, and I will trouble thine ears no more, since for thee my voice shall be silent for ever. When the time has come for thee to die, and thou dost pass, as the white men say, up "into the heavens above," and thy sight returns, and thou art once more a man, then turn thee and cry with a loud voice, "Mazooku, son of Ingoluvu, of the tribe of the Maquilisini, where art thou, oh my dog ? come thou and serve me." And surely, if I still live, then shall I hear thy voice, and groan and die, that I may pass to thee ; and if I be already dead, then shall I be there at thy side even as thou callest. This thou wilt do for me, oh my Father and my chief, because, lo ! I have loved thee as the child loves her who suckled it, and I would look upon thy face again, oh my Father from the olden

time, my chief from generation to generation.'

'If it be in my power, this I will do, Mazooku.'

The great Zulu drew himself up, raised his spear, and for the first and last time in his life gave Ernest the royal salute—to which, by the way, he had no right at all—'*Bayète, Bayète!*' Then he turned and ran swiftly thence, nor would he see Ernest again before he went. 'The pain of death was over,' he said.

As the sound of his footsteps grew faint Ernest sighed.

'There goes our last link with South Africa, Jeremy, my boy. It makes me very sad, and sometimes I think that, as he says, it is a pity we did not go under with Alston and the others. It would all have been over now.'

'Thank you,' said Jeremy, after reflecting, 'on the whole I am pretty comfortable as I am.'

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. CARDUS ACCOMPLISHES HIS REVENGE.

MR. DE TALOR owed his great wealth not to his own talents, but to a lucky secret in the manufacture of the grease used on railways discovered by his father. Talor *père* had been a railway guard till his discovery brought him wealth. He was a shrewd man, however, and on his sudden accession of fortune, did his best to make a gentleman of his only son, at that date a lad of fifteen; but it was too late, the associations and habits of childhood are not easily overcome, and no earthly power or education could accomplish the desired

object. When his son was twenty years of age, old Jack Talor died, and his son succeeded to his large fortune and a railway-grease business which supplied the principal markets of the world.

This son had inherited a good deal of his father's shrewdness, and set himself to make the best of his advantages. First he placed a 'de' before his name, and assumed a canting crest. Next he bought the Ceswick Ness estates, and bloomed into a country gentleman. It was shortly after this latter event that he made a mistake, and fell in love with the beauty of the neighbourhood, Mary Atterleigh. But Mary Atterleigh would have none of him, being at the time secretly engaged to Mr. Cardus. In vain did he resort to every possible means to shake her resolution, even going so far as to try to bribe her father to put pressure upon her; but at this time old

Atterleigh, 'Hard-riding Atterleigh,' as he was called, was well off, and resisted his advances, whereupon De Talor, in a fit of pique, married another woman, who was only too glad to put up with his vulgarity in consideration of his wealth and position as a county magnate.

Shortly afterwards three events occurred almost simultaneously. 'Hard-riding Atterleigh' got into money difficulties through over-gratification of his passion for hounds and horses; Mr. Cardus was taken abroad for the best part of a year in connection with a business matter; and a man named Jones, a friend of Mr. de Talor's, staying in his house at the time, fell in love with Mary Atterleigh. Herein De Talor saw an opportunity of revenge upon his rival, Mr. Cardus. He urged upon Jones that his real road to the possession of the lady lay through the pocket of her father, and even went so far as

to advance him the necessary funds to bribe Atterleigh ; for though Jones was well off, he could not at such short notice lay hands upon a sufficient sum in cash to serve his ends.

The plot succeeded. Atterleigh's scruples were overcome as easily as the scruples of men in his position without principle to back them generally are, and pressure of a most outrageous sort was brought to bear upon the gentle-minded Mary, with the result that when Mr. Cardus returned from abroad, he found his affianced bride the wife of another man, who became in due course the father of Jeremy and Dolly.

This cruel and most unexpected bereavement drove Mr. Cardus partially mad, and when he came to himself, there arose in his mind a monomania for revenge on all concerned in bringing it about. It became the passion and object of his life. Directing all his remarkable intelligence and energy to

the matter, he early discovered the heinous part that De Talor had played in the plot, and swore to devote his life to the unholy purpose of avenging it. For years he pursued his enemy, trying plan after plan to achieve his ruin, and as one failed, fell back upon another. But to ruin a man of De Talor's wealth was no easy matter, especially when, as in the present instance, the avenger was obliged to work like a mole, in the dark, never allowing his enemy to suspect that he was other than a friend. How he ultimately achieved his purpose the reader shall now learn.

Ernest and Dorothy had been married about three weeks, and the latter was just beginning to get accustomed to hearing herself called Lady Kershaw, when one morning a dog-cart drove up to the door, and out of it emerged Mr. de Talor.

‘Dear me, how Mr. de Talor has changed of late !’ said Dorothy, who was looking out of the window.

‘How? Has he grown less like a butcher?’ asked Ernest.

‘No,’ she answered; ‘but he looks like a worn-up butcher about to go through the Bankruptcy Court.’

‘Butchers never go bankrupt,’ said Ernest, and at that moment Mr. de Talor came in.

Dorothy was right, the man was much changed. The fat cheeks were flabby and fallen, the insolent air was gone, and he was so shrunken that he looked not more than half his former size.

‘How do you do, Lady Kershaw. I saw Cardus ’ad got some one with him, so I drove round to pay my respects and congratulate the bride. Why, bless me, Sir Ernest, you ’ave grown since I saw you last. Ah, we used to be great friends then.

You remember how you used to come and shoot up at the Ness' (he had once or twice given the two lads a day's rabbit shooting). 'But bless me, I hear that you have become quite a fire-eater since then, and been knocking over the niggers right and left—eh.'

He paused for breath, and Ernest said a few words, not many, for he disliked the man's flattery as much as in past years he used to dislike his insolence.

'Ah,' went on De Talor, looking up and pointing to the case containing the witch's head, 'I see you've still got that beastly thing that your brother once showed me. I thought it was a clock, and he pretty well frightened me out of my wits. Now I think of it, I've never 'ad any luck since I saw that thing.'

At this moment the housekeeper Grice came to say that Mr. Cardus was ready to see Mr. de Talor if he would step into the office.

Dorothy thought that their visitor turned paler at this news, and it evidently occupied his mind sufficiently to cause him to hurry from the room without bidding them good-bye.

When Mr. de Talor entered the office he found the lawyer pacing up and down.

‘How do you do, Cardus?’ he said jauntily.

‘How do you do, Mr. de Talor?’ was the cold reply.

De Talor walked to the glass door and looked at the glowing mass of blooming orchids.

‘Pretty flowers, Cardus, those, very. Orchids, ain’t they? Must have cost you a pot of money.’

‘They have not cost me much, Mr. de Talor; I have reared most of them.’

‘Then you are lucky; the bill my man gives me for his orchids is something awful.’

‘You did not come to speak to me about orchids, Mr. de Talor.’

‘No, Cardus, I didn’t; business first, pleasure afterwards—eh !’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Cardus in his soft jerky way. ‘Business first, pleasure afterwards.’

Mr. de Talor fidgeted his legs about.

‘Well, Cardus, about that mortgage. You are going to give me a little more time, I hope ?’

‘On the contrary, Mr. de Talor, the interest being now eight months overdue, I have given my London agents orders to foreclose, for I don’t conduct such business myself.’

De Talor turned pale. ‘Foreclose ! Good God, Cardus, it is not possible, on such an old friend too.’

‘Excuse me, it is not only possible, but a fact. Business is business even where *old friends* are concerned.’

‘But if you foreclose, what is to become of me, Cardus?’

‘That, I imagine, is a matter for your exclusive consideration.’

His visitor gasped, and looked like an unfortunate fish suddenly pulled out of the water.

‘Let us recapitulate the facts. I have at different periods within the last several years lent you sums of money secured on your landed estates at Ceswick’s Ness and the neighbourhood, amounting in all’—referring to a paper—‘to one hundred and seventy-six thousand five hundred and thirty-eight pounds ten shillings and four pence; or, reckoning in the overdue interest, to one hundred and seventy-nine thousand and fifty-two pounds eight shillings. That is so, I think.’

‘Yes, I suppose so, Cardus.’

‘There is no supposition about it. The documents prove it.’

‘Well, Cardus?’

‘Well, Mr. de Talor; and now, as you cannot pay, I have instructed my London agents to commence an action in Chancery for the sale of the lands, and to buy in the property. It is a most desirable property.’

‘Oh, Cardus, don’t be ’ard on me. I am an old man now, and you led me into this speculation.’

‘Mr. de Talor, I also am an old man; if not very old in years, at least as old as Methuselah in heart.’

‘I don’t understand it all, Cardus.’

‘It will give me the greatest pleasure to explain. But to do so, I must go back a little. Some ten or twelve years ago, you may remember,’ he began, sitting down with his back to the light, which struck full on the wretched De Talor’s face, ‘that a firm named Rastrick and Codley took out a patent for a new railway-grease, and set up an establishment in Manchester not far

from the famous De Talor house, which was established by your father.'

'Yes, curse them,' groaned de Talor.

Mr. Cardus smiled. 'By all means curse them. But what did this enterprising firm do, Mr. de Talor? They set to work, and sold a grease superior to the article manufactured by your house, at about eighteen per cent. cheaper. But the De Talor house had the ear of the markets, and the contracts with all the leading lines and continental firms, and for a while it seemed as though the new house must go to the wall; and if they had not had considerable capital at command they must have gone to the wall.'

'Ah, and where did they get it from? That's the mystery,' said De Talor.

'Precisely; that was the mystery. I shall clear it up a little presently. To return: after a while the buyers began to find that Rastrick and Codley's grease was a better

grease and a cheaper grease, and as the contracts lapsed, the companies renewed them, not with the De Talor house, but with the house of Rastrick and Codley. Doubtless you remember.'

Mr. de Talor groaned in acquiescence, and the lawyer continued :

'In time this state of affairs produced its natural results: De Talor's house was shopped up, and the bulk of the trade fell into the hands of the new firm.'

'Ah, I should just like to know who they really were—the low sneaks!'

'Would you? I will tell you. The firm of Rastrick and Codley were—Reginald Cardus, Esq., Solicitor, of Dum's Ness.'

Mr. de Talor struggled out of his chair, looked wildly at the lawyer, and sank down again.

'You look ill; may I offer you a glass of wine?'

The wretched man shook his head.

‘Very good. Doubtless you are curious to know how I, a lawyer, and not otherwise connected with Manchester, obtained the monopoly of the grease trade, which is, by the way, at this moment paying very well. I will satisfy your curiosity. I have always had a mania for taking up inventions, quite quietly, and in the names of others. Sometimes I have made money over them, sometimes I have lost; on the whole I have made largely. But whether I have made or lost, the inventors have, as a rule, never known who was backing them. One day, one lucky day, this railway grease patent was brought to my notice. I took it up and invested fifty thousand in it straight off the reel. Then I invested another fifty thousand. Still your firm cut my throat. I made an effort, and invested a third fifty thousand. Had I failed I should then have been a ruined man; I had strained my

credit to the utmost. But fortune favours the brave, Mr. de Talor, and I succeeded. It was your firm that failed. I have paid all my debts, and I reckon that the railway grease concern is worth, after paying liabilities, some two hundred thousand pounds. If you should care to go in for it, Messrs. Rastrick and Codley will, I have no doubt, be most happy to treat with you. It has served its purpose, and is now in the market.'

De Talor looked at him in amazement. He was too upset to speak.

‘So much, Mr. de Talor, for my share in the grease episode. The failure of your firm, or rather its stoppage from loss of trade, left you still a rich man, but only half as rich as you had been. And this, you may remember made you furious. You could not bear the idea of losing money; you would rather have lost blood from

your veins than sovereigns from your purse. When you thought of the grease which had melted in the fire of competition, you could have wept tears of rage. In this plight you came to me to ask advice.'

'Yes; and you told me to speculate.'

'Not quite accurate, Mr. de Talor. I said—I remember the words well—"You are an able man, and understand the money-market; why don't you take advantage of these fluctuating times, and recoup yourself for all you have lost?" The prospect of gain tempted you, Mr. de Talor, and you jumped at the idea. You asked me to introduce you to a reliable firm, and I introduced you to Messrs. Campsey and Ash, one of the best in the City.'

'Confound them for a set of rogues!' answered De Talor.

'Rogues! I am sorry you think so, for I have an interest in their business.'

‘Good heavens! what next?’ groaned De Talor.

‘Well, notwithstanding the best efforts of Messrs. Campsey and Ash on your behalf, in pursuance of such written instructions as you from time to time communicated to them, and to which you can no doubt refer if you please, things went wrong with you, Mr. de Talor, and year by year, when your balance-sheet was sent in, you found that you had lost more than you gained. At last, one unlucky day about three years ago, you made a plunge against the advice, you may remember, of Messrs. Campsey and Ash, and lost. It was after that, that I began to lend you money. The first loan was for fifty thousand; then came more losses, and more loans, till at length we have reached the present state of affairs.’

‘Oh, Cardus, you don’t mean to sell me

up, do you ? What shall I do without money ? And think of my daughters, 'ow will they manage without their comforts ? Give me time. What makes you so 'ard on me ?'

Mr. Cardus had been walking up and down the room rapidly. At De Talor's words he stopped, and going to a despatch-box, unlocked it, and drew from a bundle of documents a yellow piece of stamped paper. It was a cancelled bill for ten thousand pounds in the favour of Jonas de Talor, Esquire. This bill he came and held before his visitor's eyes.

'That I believe is your signature,' he said quietly, pointing to the receipt written across the bill.

De Talor turned almost livid with fear, and his lips and hands began to tremble.

'Where did you get that ?' he asked.

Mr. Cardus regarded him, or rather all round him, with the melancholy black eyes

that never looked straight at anything, and yet saw everything, and then answered :

‘ Among your friend Jones’s papers. You scoundrel ! ’ he went on, with a sudden change of manner, ‘ now perhaps you begin to understand why I have hunted you down step by step ; why for thirty years I have waited, and watched, and failed, and at last succeeded. It is for the sake of Mary Atterleigh. It was you, who, infuriated because she would have none of such a coarse brute, set the man Jones on to her. It was you who lent him the money with which to buy her from old Atterleigh. There lies the proof before you. By the way, Jones need never have repaid you that ten thousand pounds, for it was marriage-brokage, and therefore not recoverable at law. It was you, I say, who were the first cause of my life being laid waste, and who nearly drove me to the madhouse ;

ay! who did drive Mary, my betrothed wife, into the arms of that fellow, whence, God be praised, she soon passed to her rest.'

Mr. Cardus paused, breathing quick with suppressed rage and excitement: the large white eyebrows contracted till they nearly met, and, abandoning his usual habit, he looked straight into the eyes of the abject creature in the chair before him.

'It's a long while ago, Cardus; can't you forgive, and let bygones be bygones?'

'Forgive!—yes, for my own sake I could forgive, but for her sake, whom you first dishonoured and then killed, I will never forgive. Where are your companions in guilt? Jones is dead; I ruined him. Atterleigh is there; I did not ruin him, because after all he was the author of Mary's life, but his ill-gotten gains did him no good; a higher power than mine took

vengeance on his crime, and I saved him from the madhouse. And Jones's children, they are here too, for once they lay beneath *her* breast. But do you think that I will spare you?—you coarse, arrogant knave—you who spawned the plot; no, not if it were to cost me my own life, would I forego one jot or tittle of my revenge.'

At that moment Mr. Cardus happened to look up, and saw through the glass part of the door of his office, of which the curtain was partially drawn, the wild-looking head of Hard-riding Atterleigh. He appeared to be looking through the door, for his eyes, in which there was a very peculiar look, were fixed intently upon Mr. Cardus' face. When he saw that he was observed, he vanished.

'Now go,' said the lawyer sternly to the prostrate De Talor; 'and never let me see your face again.'

‘But I haven’t any money ; where am I to go ?’ groaned De Talor.

‘Wherever you like, Mr. de Talor ; this is a free country, but if I had control of your destination, it should be—to the devil.’

The wretched man staggered up.

‘All right, Cardus ; I’ll go, I’ll go. You’ve got it all your own way now. You are damned hard, you are ; but perhaps you’ll get it taken out of you some day. I’m glad you never got hold of Mary ; it must have been pleasant to you to see her marry Jones.’

In another second he was gone, and Mr. Cardus was left thinking, amongst other things, of that look in old Atterleigh’s eyes which he could not get out of his mind. Thus did he finally accomplish the revenge to which he had devoted his life.

CHAPTER XV.

MAD ATTERLEIGH'S LAST RIDE.

A MONTH had passed since Mr. de Talor had crept, utterly crushed, from the presence of the man whom Providence had appointed to mete out to him his due. During this time Mr. Cardus had been busy from morning till night. He was always a busy man, writing daily with his own hand an almost incredible number of letters, for he carried on all, or nearly all, his great affairs by correspondence, but of late his work seemed to have doubled.

In the course of that month the society in the neighbourhood of Kesterwick experienced a pleasurable sensation of excite-

ment, for suddenly the De Talor family vanished off the face of the Kesterwick world, and the Ceswick Ness estates, after being advertised, were put up for sale, and bought, so said report, by a London firm of lawyers on behalf of an unknown client. The De Talors were gone, where to nobody knew, nor did they much care to inquire—that is, with the exception of the servants whose wages were left unpaid, and the tradespeople to whom large sums were owing. They inquired, vigorously enough, but without the smallest result; the De Talors had gone and left no trace, except the trace of bankruptcy, and Kesterwick knew them no more, but was glad over the sensation made by their disappearance.

But on one Saturday Mr. Cardus' business seemed to come to a sudden stop. He wrote some letters and put them

to go to post, and then he went to admire his orchids.

‘Life,’ he said aloud to himself, ‘shall be all orchids now; my work is done. I will build a new house for Brazilian sorts, and spend two hundred pounds on stocking it. Well, I can afford it.’

This was about five o’clock. Half an hour later, when he had well examined his flowers, he strolled out Titheburgh Abbey way, and here he met Ernest and his wife who had been sitting in their favourite spot.

‘Well, my dears,’ he said, ‘and how are you?’

‘Pretty jolly, uncle, thank you, and how are you?’

‘I? Oh, I am very jolly indeed for an old man; as jolly as an individual who has just bid good-bye to work for ever should be,’ he said.

‘Why, Reginald, what *do* you mean?’

‘Mean, Dorothy, my dear ; I mean that I have wound up my affairs and retired on a modest competence. Ah, you young people should be grateful to me, for let me tell you that everything is now in apple-pie order, and when I slip off you will have no trouble at all, except to pay the probate duty, and that will be considerable. I never quite knew till a week ago how rich I was ; but, as I said the other day, everything I have touched has turned to gold. It will be a large fortune for you to manage, my dears ; you will find it a great responsibility.’

‘I hope you will live many years to manage it yourself,’ said Ernest.

‘Ah, I don’t know, I am pretty tough ; but who can see the future ? Dolly, my dear girl,’ he went on in a dreamy way, ‘you are growing like your mother. Do you know I sometimes think that I am not far

off her now ; you see I speak plainly to you two. Years ago I used to think—that is sometimes—that your mother was dust and nothing more ; that she had left me for ever ; but of late I have changed my ideas. I have seen,' he went on, speaking in an absent way as though he were meditating to himself, ' how wonderfully Providence works even in the affairs of this imperfect world, and I begin to believe that there must be a place where it allows itself a larger development. Yes, I think I shall find your mother somewhere, Dorothy, my dear. I seem to feel her very near me sometimes Well, I have avenged her.'

‘ I think that you will find her, Reginald,’ she answered ; ‘ but your vengeance is wicked and wrong. I have often made bold to tell you so, though sometimes you have been angry with me, and I tell you

so again. It can only bring evil with it. What have we, poor creatures, who do not understand the reasons of things, and can scarcely see an inch before our noses, to do with vengeance ?'

'Perhaps you are right, my love—you generally are right in the main; but my desire for vengeance upon that man De Talor has been the breath of my nostrils, and behold ! I have achieved it. Man, if he only lives long enough, and has strength of will enough, can achieve anything. But man fritters away his powers over a variety of objects ; he is led astray in pursuit of the butterfly Pleasure, or the bubble Ambition, or the Destroying Angel Woman ; and his purposes fall to the ground between a dozen stools. Most men, too, are not capable of a purpose. Men are weak creatures ; and yet what a mighty seed lies hid in every human breast. Think, my children, what man

might, nay, may become, when his weakness and follies have fallen from him, when his rudimentary virtues have been developed, and his capacities for physical and mental beauties brought to an undreamt-of perfection. Look at the wild flower and the flower of the hot-house—it is nothing as compared to the possibilities inherent in man even as we know him. Oh, it is a splendid dream ! Will it ever be fulfilled, I wonder ? Well, well,

“ Whatever there is to know,
That we shall know one day.”

Come, let us turn, it will soon be time to dress for dinner. By the way, Dorothy, that reminds me. I don't quite like the way that your respected grandfather is going on. I told him that I had no more deeds for him to copy, that I had done with deeds, and he went and got that confounded stick of his, and showed me that according to his

own little calculations his time was up ; and then he got his slate and wrote about my being the devil on it, but that I had no more power over him, and that he was bound for heaven. The other day, too, I caught him staring at me through the glass of the door, with a very queer look in his eyes.'

' Ah, Reginald, so you have noticed it. I quite agree with you ; I don't at all like his goings-on. Do you know, I think that he had better be shut up.'

' I don't like to shut him up, Dorothy. However, here we are, we will talk about it to-morrow.'

Having led Ernest to his room, Dorothy, before beginning to dress herself, went to the office to see if her grandfather was still there. And there sure enough she found him, pacing up and down, muttering and waving his long stick out of which all the notches had now been cut.

‘What are you doing, grandfather?’ she asked; ‘why haven’t you gone to dress?’

He snatched up his slate, and wrote rapidly on it :

‘Time’s up! Time’s up! Time’s up! I’ve done with the devil and all his works. I’m off to heaven on the big black horse to find Mary. Who are you? You look like Mary.’

‘Grandfather,’ said Dolly, quietly taking the slate out of his hand, ‘what do you mean by writing such nonsense? Let me hear no more of it. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Now, mind, I will have no more of it. Put away that stick, and go and wash your hands for dinner.’

The old man did as he was bid, somewhat sulkily, Dorothy thought—but when he arrived at the dinner-table there was nothing noticeable about his manner.

They dined at a quarter to seven; and

dinner did not take them very long. When it was over, old Atterleigh drank some wine, and then, according to his habit, went and sat in the ancient ingle-nook which had presumably been built by the forgotten Dum for his comfort on winter evenings. And on winter evenings, when there was a jolly wood fire burning on the hearth, it was a pleasant spot enough ; but to sit there in the dark on a lovely summer night was an act, well—worthy of old Atterleigh.

After dinner the conversation turned upon that fatal day when Alston's Horse was wiped out at Isandhlwana. It was a painful subject both to Ernest and Jeremy, but the former was gratifying his uncle's curiosity by explaining to him how that last dread struggle with the six Zulus came to determine itself in their favour.

‘ And how was it,’ asked Mr. Cardus, ‘ that you managed to get the better of the fellow you rolled down the hill with ? ’

‘Because the assegai broke, and fortunately enough the blade was left in my hand. Where is it, Doll?’ (for Jeremy had brought it home with him).

Dorothy got up and reached the broken assegai, which had about eight inches of shaft, from its place over the mantelpiece.

‘Now then, Jeremy, if you will be so good as to sprawl upon your back on the floor, I will just show my uncle what happened. Jeremy complied, not without grumbling about dirtying his dress-coat.

‘Now, Jeremy, my boy, where are you? Oh, there! Well, excuse my taking the liberty of kneeling on your chest, and holloa out if the assegai goes into you. If we are going to have a performance at all, it may as well be a realistic one. Now, uncle, you see when we finished rolling, which was just as this assegai snapped in two, as luck would have it I was uppermost, and managed to get my knee on to my friend’s left arm, and

to hold his right with my left. Then, before he could get loose, I drove this bit of spear through the side of his throat, just there, so that it cut the jugular vein, and he died shortly afterwards—and now you know all about it.' Here Ernest rose and laid the spear upon the table, and Jeremy, entering into the spirit of the thing, began to die as artistically as a regard for his dress-coat would allow. Just then, Dorothy, looking up, saw her grandfather Atterleigh's distorted face peering round the wall of the ingle-nook, where he was sitting in the dark, and looking at the scene of mimic slaughter with that same curious gaze that he had worn on several occasions lately. He withdrew his head at once.

'Get up, Jeremy,' said his sister sharply, 'and stop writhing about there like a great snake. You look as though you had been murdered ; it is horrible.'

Jeremy arose laughing, and having obtained Dolly's permission, they all lit their pipes, and sitting there in the fading light, fell to talking about that sad scene of slaughter, which indeed appeared that night to have a strange fascination for Mr. Cardus. He asked Ernest and Jeremy about it again and again—how this man was killed, and that?—did they die at once, and so on?

The subject was always distressing to Ernest, and one to which he rarely alluded, full as it was for him of the most painful recollections, especially those connected with his dear friend Alston and his son.

Dorothy knew this, and knew too that Ernest would be down on his luck for at least a day after the conversation, which she did her best to stop. At last she succeeded, but the melancholy associations connected with the talk had apparently already done their work, for everybody

lapsed into the most complete silence, and sat grouped together at the top end of the old oak table as quiet as though they were cut in stone. Meanwhile the twilight deepened, and little gusts of wind arose, and gently shook the old-fashioned window-lattices, making a sound as though feeble hands were trying to throw them open. The dull evening light crept from place to place, and threw great shadows about the room, glanced upon the armour on its panelled walls, and at last began to die away into darkness. The whole scene was eerie, and for some unknown reason it oppressed Dorothy. She wondered why everybody was so silent, and yet she herself did not feel equal to breaking the silence ; there was a load upon her heart.

Just then a curious thing happened. As the reader may remember, the case containing the wonderful mummied head found by

Eva Ceswick, had years before been placed by Jeremy upon a bracket at the end of the room. Round about this case hung various pieces of armour, and amongst others, above it, suspended by a piece of string from a projecting hook, was a heavy iron gauntlet. For many years—twenty or more—it had hung from the hook, but now at last the string was worn through, and even as Dorothy was wondering at the silence it gave. Down came the heavy iron hand with a crash, and as it passed, it caught the latch of the long air-tight case, and jarred the door wide open.

Everybody in the room sprung to their feet, and as they did so, a last ray from the setting sun struggled through one of the windows and rested upon the opened case, staining it, and all about it, the hue of blood, and filling the fearful crystal eyes within with a lurid light. How they glowed

and shone to be sure, after their long years of sleep!—for the case had scarcely been opened for years—while their tremulous glance, now dull, now intense, according as the light played upon them, appeared to wander round and round the room, as though in search of somebody or something.

It was an awful sight that that ray of sunlight showed, as it played upon the trembling crystal orbs, the scornful deathly features, and the matchless hair that streamed on either side. Together with the sudden break in the silence caused by the clashing fall of the gauntlet, it proved, as it had done many years before, altogether too much for the beholders' nerves.

‘What is that?’ asked Ernest, with a start, as the gauntlet fell.

Dorothy glanced up and gave a little cry of horror. ‘Oh, that dreadful head!—it is looking at us.’

They all rose to their feet, and Dorothy, seizing Ernest by one hand, and covering her eyes with the other, retreated, slowly followed by the others, towards the swing-door. Soon they had reached the door, were through it, down the passage, and out in the peaceful stillness of the evening. Then Jeremy spoke, and his language was more forcible than polite.

‘Well, I am blowed !’ he said, wiping the cold perspiration from his forehead.

‘Oh, Reginald, I do wish you would get that horrible thing out of the house ; there has been nothing but misfortune ever since it has been here. I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it,’ said Dolly hysterically.

‘Nonsense, you superstitious child !’ answered Mr. Cardus, who was now recovering from his start. ‘The gauntlet knocked the door open, that was all. It is nothing but a mummied head ; but if you don’t like

it, I will send it to the British Museum to-morrow.'

'Oh, please do, Reginald,' answered Dorothy, who appeared quite unhinged.

So hurried had been the retreat from the sitting-room, that everybody had forgotten 'Hard-riding Atterleigh' sitting in the dark in the ingle-nook. But the bustle in the room had attracted him, and already, before they had left, he had projected his large head covered with the tangled grey locks and begun to stare about. Presently his eyes fell upon the crystal orbs, and then, to him, the orbs appeared to cease their wanderings and rest upon his eyes. For a while the two heads stared at each other thus—the golden head without a body in the box, and the grey head that, thrust out as it was from the ingle wall, *seemed* to have no body either. They stared and

stared, till at last the golden head got the mastery of the grey head, and the old man crept from his corner, crept down the room till he was almost beneath the baleful eyes, and *nodded, nodded, nodded* at them.

And they too seemed to *nod, nod, nod* at him. Then he retreated backwards as slowly as he had come, nodding all the while, till he came to where the broken assegai lay upon the table, and taking it, thrust it up his sleeve. As he did so the ray of light faded and the fiery eyes went out. It was as though the thick white lids and long eyelashes had dropped over them.

None of the other four returned to the sitting-room that night.

When he had recovered from his fright, Jeremy went into his little room, the same in which he used to stuff birds as a boy, and busied himself with his farm

accounts. Mr. Cardus, Dorothy, and Ernest walked about together in the balmy moonlight, for very shortly after the twilight had departed, the great harvest moon came up and flooded the world with light. Mr. Cardus was in a talkative, excited mood that night. He talked about his affairs which he had now finally wound up, and about Mary Atterleigh, mentioning little tricks of manner and voice which were reproduced in Dorothy. He talked too about Ernest's and Dorothy's marriage, and said what a comfort it was to him. Finally, about ten o'clock, he said that he was tired and was going to bed.

‘God bless you, my dears, sleep well. Good night,’ he said. ‘We will settle about that new orchid house to-morrow. Good night, good night.’

Shortly afterwards Dorothy and Ernest also went to bed, reaching their room by

a back entrance, for they neither of them felt inclined to come under the fire of the crystal eyes again, and soon they were asleep in each other's arms.

The minutes stole on one by one through the silence of the dead night, bearing their records with them to the archives of the past. Eleven o'clock came and fled away ; midnight came too, and swept on bat-like wings across the world. Everywhere—on land, sky, and sea—there was silence, nothing but silence sleeping in the moonlight.

Hark ! Oh heavens, what was that ?

One fearful, heart-rending yell of agony, ringing all through the ancient house, rattling the casements, shaking the armour against the panelled walls, pulsing and throbbing in horrible notes out into the night, echoing and dying far away over the sea.

And then silence again, silence sleeping in the moonlight.

They sprang from their beds, did every living soul beneath that roof, and rushed in their night-gear, men and women together, into the sitting-room. The crystal eyes seemed to be awake again, for the moon was up and played upon them, causing them now and then to flash out in gleams of opalescent light.

Somebody lit a candle, somebody missed Mr. Cardus; surely he could never have slept through that! Yes, he had slept through it. They rushed and tumbled, a confused mass of white, into the room where he lay. He was there sure enough, and he slept very sound, with a red gash in his throat, from which the blood fell in heavy drops down, down to the ground.

They stood aghast, and as they stood, from the courtyard outside there came a sound of

galloping hoofs. They knew the sound of the galloping, it was that of Ernest's great black stallion.

A mile or more away out on the marshes, just before you come to the well-known quicksands, which have, tradition says, swallowed so many unfortunates, and which shudder palpably at times and are unpleasant to look on, stands a lock-house, inhabited by one solitary man who has charge of the sluice. On this very night it is necessary for him to open his sluice-gates at a particular moment, and now he stands awaiting that propitious time. He is an ancient mariner; his hands are in his pockets, his pipe is in his mouth, his eyes are fixed upon the sea. We have met him before. Suddenly he hears the sound of a powerful horse galloping furiously. He turns, and his hair begins to rise upon his

head, for this is what he sees in the bright moonlight.

Fast, fast towards him thunders a great coal-black horse, snorting with mingled rage and terror, and on its bare back there sits, with a grip of iron, a man,—an old man, for his grey locks stream out behind him, who waves above his head the fragment of a spear.

On they come. Before them is the wide sluice; if they are mortal they will turn or plunge into it. No, the great black horse gathers himself, and springs into the air.

By Heaven, he has cleared it! No horse ever took that leap before, or will again. On at whirlwind speed towards the shuddering quicksand two hundred yards away.

Splash! horse and man are in it, making the moist mass shake and tremble for twenty yards round. The bright moonlight shows it all. The horse shrieks in fear and

agony, as only a horse can ; the man on its back waves the spear.

The horse vanishes, the man vanishes, the spear glitters an instant longer in the moonlight, and then vanishes too. They have all vanished for ever.

They have all vanished, and again the perfect silence sleeps in the moonlight.

‘Bust me,’ says the ancient one aloud, and shaking with a mortal dread, ‘bust me, I have stood still and seed many a queer thing, but I never seed a thing like that,’ and he turned and fled as fast as his old legs would carry him,—forgetful of Dutch cheeses and of sluice-gates, forgetful of everything except that demon horse and man.

Thus ended ‘Hard-riding Atterleigh’s’ maddest gallop, and thus too ended the story of Mr. Cardus and his revenge.

CHAPTER XVI.

DOROTHY'S TRIUMPH.

MANY years passed before Eva Plowden returned to Kesterwick, and then she was carried thither. Alive she did not return, nor during all those years did she and Ernest ever meet.

They buried her, in obedience to her last wishes, there in the churchyard where lay generation upon generation of her ancient race, and the daisies grew above her head. Twice had they bloomed above her before Sir Ernest Kershaw stood by the spot, hallowed by the presence of what had held the spirit of the woman he had loved.

He was a grizzled man of nearly fifty now, nor were streaks of grey wanting in Dorothy's hair, as they stood that summer

evening by Eva's grave. Many things had happened to the pair since Mr. Cardus' tragic death. They had had children,—some they had lost, some remained,—honest English lads and lasses, with their father's eyes. They had enjoyed great wealth, and spent it royally, giving with both hands to all who needed. They had drunk deep of the cup of this world's joys and sorrows. Ernest had gone into Parliament, and made something of a name there. Then, impatient for the active life of earlier days, he had accepted a high colonial appointment, for which, notwithstanding his blindness, his wealth and parliamentary reputation eminently fitted him. Now he had just returned from filling the governorship of one of the Australian colonies.

Many years had passed, many things had happened. And yet as he stood by that heap of turf, which he could not see, it seemed but yesterday when——and he sighed.

‘Not quite cured yet, Ernest?’ said Dorothy interrogatively.

‘Yes, Dorothy,’ he answered, with a little sigh, ‘I think I am cured. At any rate,’ he went on, as she took his hand to lead him away from the grave, ‘I have learnt to accept the decrees of Providence without murmuring. I have done with dreams, and outlived pessimism. Life would, it is true, have been a different thing for me if poor Eva had not deserted me, for she poisoned its waters at the fount, and so they have always tasted rather bitter. But happiness is not the end and object of man’s existence, and if I could I do not think I would undo the past. Take me to the old flat tombstone, Dolly, near the door.’

She led him to it and he sat down.

‘Ah,’ he went on, ‘how beautiful she was! was there ever woman like her, I wonder? And now her bones lie there; her beauty is all gone, and there lives of her

only the unending issues of *what she did*. I have only to think, Dolly, and I can see her as I saw her a score of times passing in and out of this church door. Yes, I can see her, and the people round her, and the clothes she wore, and the smile in her beautiful dark eyes—for her eyes seemed to smile, you remember, Dolly. How I worshipped her too with all my heart and soul and strength, as though she were an angel! and that was my mistake, Dolly. She was only a woman—a weak woman.'

‘ You said just now that you were cured, Ernest ; one would hardly think it to hear you talk,’ put in Dorothy, smiling.

‘ Yes, Doll, I am cured ; you have cured me, my dear wife, for you have crept into my life and taken possession of it, so that there is little room for anybody else, and now, Dorothy, I love you with all my heart.’

She pressed his hand and smiled again, for she knew that she had triumphed, and

that he did love her, truly love her, and that his passion for Eva was a poor thing compared to what it had been twenty years before—more indeed of a tender regret, not unmixed with a starry hope, than a passion at all. Dorothy was a clever little person, and understood something of Ernest and the human heart in general. She had thought long ago that she would win Ernest altogether to her in the end. By what tenderness, by what devotion and nobility of character she accomplished this, the reader who knows her can well imagine, but in the end she did accomplish it, as she deserved to. The contrast between the conduct of the two women who had mainly influenced his life was too marked for Ernest, a man of a just and reasonable mind, to altogether ignore, and when once he came to comparisons the natural results followed. And yet, though he learnt to love Dorothy so dearly, it cannot be said that he forgot Eva, because there

are some things that a man can never forget, since they are a part of his inner life, and of these first love is unfortunately one.

‘ Ernest,’ went on Dorothy, ‘ you remember what you told me when you asked me to marry you in Titheburgh Abbey, about your belief that your affection for Eva would outlast the world, and find a continued expression in the lives to come. Do you still believe that ? ’

‘ Yes, Doll, to a great extent.’

His wife sat and thought for a minute.

‘ Ernest,’ she said presently.

‘ Yes, dear.’

‘ I have managed to hold my own against Eva in this world, when she had all the chances and all the beauty on her side, and what I have to say about your theories now is, that when we get to the next, and are *all* beautiful, it will be very strange if I don’t manage to hold it there. She had her chance and she threw it away ; now I have

got mine, and I don't mean to throw it away either in this world or the next.'

Ernest laughed a little. 'I must say, my dear, it would be a very poor heaven if you were not there.'

'I should think so indeed. Those whom God hath joined together let not man put asunder, or woman either. But what is the good of our stopping here to talk such stuff about things of which we really understand nothing. Come, Ernest, Jeremy and the boys will be waiting for us.'

And so hand in hand they went on homewards through the quiet twilight.

THE END.

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